



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

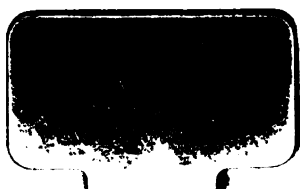
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

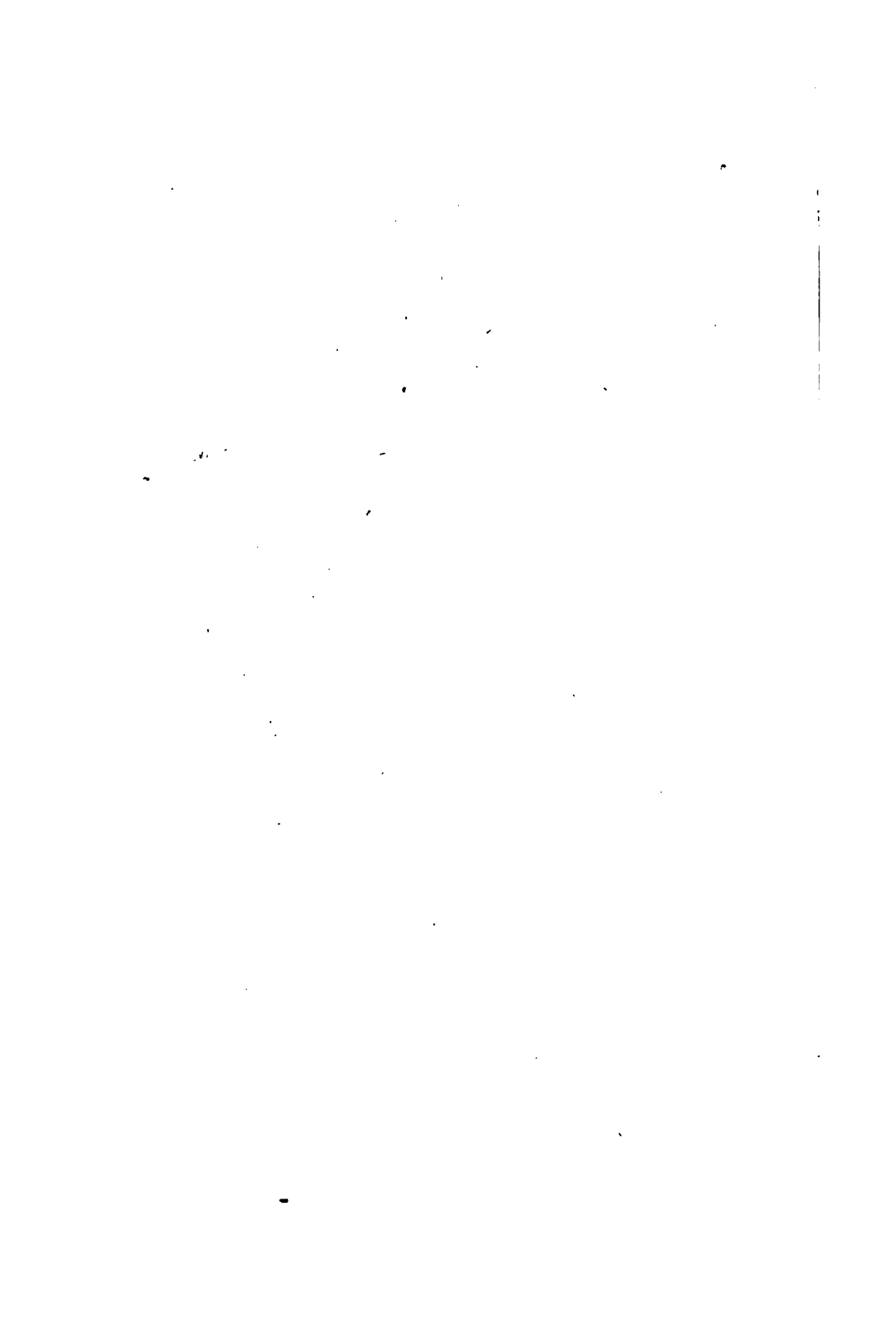




600075737Z







LONDON'S HEART.

BY

B. L. FARJEON,

AUTHOR OF 'GRIF,' 'JOSHUA MARVEL,' 'BLADE-O'-GRASS,' AND
'BRAD-AND-CHEESE AND KISSES.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18 CATHERINE ST. STRAND.

1873.

[All rights of translation and reproduction are reserved.]

249 . 9 . 277.

LONDON:
ROBSON AND SONS, PRINTERS, FANCRAE ROAD, N.W

CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

CHAP.	PAGE
xxxiii. LIZZIE DEEMS IT NECESSARY TO CALL CUN- NING TO HER AID	I
xxxiv. GOOD COUNSEL	29
xxxv. MR. PODMORE WISHES TO BE INSTRUCTED UPON THE DOCTRINE OF RESPONSIBILITY, AND DECLARES THAT HE HAS A PRESENTIMENT.	48
xxxvi. HOW FELIX GAINED A CLUE	65
xxxvii. JIM PODMORE HAS A DREAM, AND WAKES UP IN TIME	75
xxxviii. FELIX BECOMES A LANDLORD	95
xxxix. ALFRED'S LAST CHANCE.	107
xl. ON EPSOM DOWNS	137
xli. ON THE WATCH	152
xlii. THE CLOUDS BRIGHTEN FOR LILY	166
xliii. MR. SHELDRAKE MAKES A BOLD MOVE	184
xliv. A CRISIS	211
xlv. HOW MR. SHELDRAKE PLAYS HIS GAME	244
xlvi. FATHER AND DAUGHTER	256
xlvii. FELIX CHECKMATES MR. DAVID SHELDRAKE	272



LONDON'S HEART.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

LIZZIE DEEMS IT NECESSARY TO CALL CUNNING TO
HER AID.

THE first thing Lily saw when she recovered consciousness was Lizzie's face bending down to hers. In that instant Lizzie began to act: as all women do upon every possible occasion. If those who enlist in the ranks of the drama would but act on the stage as they act off it, there would be no talk of the decadence of dramatic art. Every trace of anxiety vanished from Lizzie's face as Lily's eyes looked into hers, and she smiled so brightly and nodded so encouragingly as to infuse strength into the heart of her friend.

'Where am I, Lizzie?'

'With friends, my dear. The theatre was so hot that I almost fainted myself.'

'Did I faint, then? How foolish of me!' A look of joy filled her eyes as they lighted on her brother. 'O Alfred!'

He knelt by her side, and she took his hand and retained it. By this time the theatre was fast being emptied.

'I remember now what it was that overcame me. The horrible sight of that man dying!'

She shuddered, and Lizzie said briskly,

'Never mind; we're not going to think of that any more. It was only a piece of acting, after all. We'll go to see something more lively next time.'

And Lizzie nodded emphatically at Alfred, who answered,

'Yes, we will. I didn't know what sort of a piece this was, or I shouldn't have brought you to see it.'

'But Mr. Sheldrake knew,' remarked Lizzie, with a sharp glance in the direction of that gentleman.

'I assure you I did not,' was Mr. Sheldrake's reply. 'You do me great injustice, and not for the first time to-night. I have too high a re-

gard for Miss Lily to cause her pain. She knows that, I am sure ; and so does Alfred.'

'I know it well,' interposed Alfred eagerly ; 'and Lily knows it too. How can you be so unjust, Liz ?'

'This is the first time I have seen the play,' continued Mr. Sheldrake, 'and I had no idea it was anything of this kind.'

He spoke the untruth with a well-assumed air of injured innocence.

During this passage at arms, Lily had regarded Alfred with anxious solicitude, and now he asked,

'Isn't Liz mistaken and unjust, Lily ? To put the blame on Mr. Sheldrake !'

Lily turned to her friend. 'I am sure you are mistaken. I'm so sorry for all this. I am the only one to blame for being so weak and foolish.'

This brought Mr. Sheldrake out in full force ; he was almost tender in his expressions of sympathy for Lily, and he even relented so far towards Lizzie as to hold up a warning finger to her as a caution not to be unjust to her friends for the future.

'And now,' he said, when Lily was ready to

depart, 'I propose we go and have a little supper.'

'No, thank you,' said Lizzie, in a decided tone, not at all softened by the evidence of Mr. Sheldrake's magnanimity.

Mr. Sheldrake bit his lip.

'You speak for all,' he said.

'I think so. Lily will not go without me, and of course Alfred must see me home.'

'Why won't you accept Mr. Sheldrake's invitation, Liz?' asked Alfred uneasily.

'Daddy is waiting up for me, and we have a long way to go. And besides, Lily is unwell.'

For one instant, Mr. Sheldrake hesitated; but only for an instant.

'Well, it's of no use trying to persuade you. A wilful woman will have her way. How do you propose we shall go home?' he asked of Lizzie in a tone of sarcastic politeness. 'Your way is different from ours.'

Lizzie decided this without hesitation. They would all go in one cab, and drop Lily at the door of her grandfather's house in Soho, and then Alfred should see Lizzie home. Mr. Sheldrake made no demur to her suggestion, and the party

drove from the theatre. But he stopped the cab at the corner of the little street in Soho, and said that the driver need not turn, as he could see Lily the few yards she had to go. He jumped out of the cab, and said to Alfred,

‘By the bye, Alf, I want to say a word or two to you. The girls will excuse us for a moment.’

Alfred and he walked half-a-dozen steps from the cab, and then he turned upon Alfred, and asked what was the meaning of Lizzie’s behaviour.

‘I don’t know,’ replied Alfred; ‘I never saw her in such a humour before. I hope you don’t think I am to blame for what has occurred.’

‘I haven’t stopped to think. When a man’s made mad as I’ve been to-night, he doesn’t think of much else but the cause. Look here, Alfred, I don’t want to pry into your secrets, my boy, and I don’t want to spoil your love-making. You know best whether I’ve been a friend to you or not——’

‘You have been,’ interrupted Alfred eagerly; ‘a true friend!’

‘Well, then, I’m not going to be made to look small by any sweetheart of yours. I’ve nothing

to say against Lizzie; but she mustn't come any of her tricks with me. Now, you've got some control over her, I don't doubt. She'll heed what you say. Take my advice. Tell her to be more civil to me for the future. If she isn't—' here he paused, and gave Alfred a significant look—' well, if she isn't, I might turn rusty. And that might be awkward for you, Alf.'

There was no mistaking his meaning, and Alfred's heart sickened at the threat conveyed in the words. It suited Mr. Sheldrake not to notice Alfred's discomposure, and they returned to the cab in silence.

'I'll walk with you, Lily,' said Lizzie, as Mr. Sheldrake held out his hand to assist Lily from the cab; 'it's only a few steps, and the cab can wait.'

But Mr. Sheldrake put a restraining hand upon her arm.

'I can see Miss Lily safely to her door,' he said politely. 'You have a long way to go, and Mr. Musgrave is waiting up for you, you said. It's very late, and you'd best be moving. Eh, Alfred?'

'Yes, yes,' returned Alfred hurriedly; 'we must rattle on. Good-night, Lil dear. Good-

night, Mr. Sheldrake. I'll see you to-morrow some time.'

Mr. Sheldrake raised his hat to Lizzie, and the cab drove away. For a few moments neither Lizzie nor Alfred spoke. Their thoughts were not in unison. But Lizzie, the more gentle nature of the two, presently crept close to Alfred and placed her hand in his. He threw it from him angrily. She resented this at first, and shrank from him; but a better feeling came upon her soon, and she asked:

'What have I done, Alfred, that you behave in this manner to me?'

'Done!' he repeated, with bitter emphasis. 'Been the ruin of me, I shouldn't wonder!'

'Alfred!'

'O, yes,' he said sullenly. 'It's all very well for you to cry Alfred in that tone; but it won't mend matters. I thought you loved me——'

'Have I not proved it, Alfred?' she interrupted, in a tone of sadness.

'But I have found out my mistake,' he continued, not heeding her words; 'it's always the way. Mr. Sheldrake is right in what he says about women; no man ought to trust them.'

'Do you think you ought not to trust me?'

Do you think there is anything in the world that I would not do for your sake? O Alfred, you speak blindly !'

‘I am the best judge of that,’ he returned quickly; ‘you don’t know all. If there is nothing in the world that you would not do for my sake, why should you act in such a manner to-night as to set Mr. Sheldrake dead against me?’

Lizzie did not reply for a few moments; her face was turned towards her lover, as if striving to read his thoughts. She could not see his features distinctly in the gloom of the cab, but his voice was a sufficient index to the trouble that possessed him.

‘You speak as if you were afraid of Mr. Sheldrake, Alfred?’

‘I should have reason to be if he turned rusty. He gave me a warning to-night.’

‘Because I displeased him?’

‘Yes, because of you. It makes me sick to think of it, to speak of it. I wish I was dead! I am the most miserable wretch in the world! If it were not for you and Lily, I think I should make away with myself.’

‘Don’t speak like that, Alf,’ said Lizzie, placing her arm tenderly around him; ‘it breaks my

heart to see you so unhappy. I know you love me and Lily. And you ought to be sure that we are better friends to you than Mr. Sheldrake can be, and that we would do more for you if it was in our power.'

'That's it. If it was in your power. But it isn't, and it *is* in Mr. Sheldrake's; and he has behaved like a true friend to me.'

'Sometimes I ask myself, Alfred, what can be his motive?'

'I know that you are prejudiced against him; and that's the reason you suspect him, and can't be civil to him. You think he wouldn't do me a kindness without a motive?'

'I am sure he wouldn't,' said Lizzie firmly; 'and I am sure of another thing—that you, in your heart, do not like him. I wish you had never seen him.'

'I wish I hadn't,' groaned Alfred.

'And yet you have told me he was your best friend, Alfred.'

'Don't badger me, Liz, for God's sake! I am almost torn to pieces as it is. You ought to comfort me, and try and make things better for me.'

'Ah, if I could! If I knew how to, how gladly would I! Why not confide entirely in me,

Alf? Who can have a better right to your confidence than the girl that loves you with all her heart and soul?—as I do, Alf, my dear! Come now, tell me all. Who knows? Something good may come of it. What's your trouble?

‘Money.’

‘Yes, I know that; and that you owe Mr. Sheldrake more than you can pay. Tell me how it all came about, dear.’

So by many little endearing ways she coaxed him to tell her the whole of his miserable story. How, excited by the glowing accounts in the papers of the easy manner in which fortunes could be made on the turf, he had commenced to bet, a few shillings at the time at first; how he attended races, and how one unfortunate day he won a few pounds, and came home flushed with the idea that he had found the philosopher's stone; how little by little he had been led on, with the inevitable result of losing more than he could afford; how on one important race, when the prophets and tipsters in every one of the papers had declared—in such glowing and confident terms that it was impossible to resist the temptation of making a bold plunge for fortune—that a certain horse could not possibly lose, he had used money which did

not belong to him ; and how the horse came in last instead of first.

‘I had to make up that money, of course,’ he continued ; ‘I had to get it somehow ; and I did get it—never mind in what manner. You can imagine what I suffered, Liz ! I thought I had fortune in my hands ; and I had, but I was tricked out of it—for the whole affair was a swindle ; and I shouldn’t wonder if some of the prophets and tipsters were not in it. The horse was never intended to win ; and they swore it couldn’t lose.’

He derived comfort from the confession he was making ; he took no blame to himself ; and he did not, when he reached this point, tell her the story of the theft from the iron box. Then he went on to narrate how he had made Mr. Sheldrake’s acquaintance, and how that gentleman had lent him money from time to time, and how misfortune continued to pursue him. He would have had his pockets filled with money over and over again if it had not been that things invariably went wrong with him just at the critical moment.

‘It was from no want of judgment on my part, Liz. I had got to learn as much as any of the prophets and tipsters, and yet I could never manage to turn up trumps. I saw other fellows,

who didn't know in their whole bodies as much as I knew in my little finger, make hundreds and hundreds of pounds. It only wants sticking to, Liz. I'll make all our fortunes yet; you see if I don't! There's the City and Suburban coming on; and I know something that'll open their eyes. And when I pay Mr. Sheldrake the money I owe him, I'll cut with him, if it's only to please you; although he's behaved like a brick to me, mind that, Liz!

By the time he had reached the end of his recital he had recovered some of his good spirits. Lizzie listened in silence, and interrupted him only once, to ask whether he ever made any bets with Mr. Sheldrake.

'O, no,' was the reply; 'Sheldrake will never bet with me, Liz. Why, sometimes he tries to persuade me not to back a horse that I'm sweet on, and even tries to persuade me not to bet on races at all. "It's a bad game, Alf," he has said to me more than once, "it's a bad game, unless you've got a strong bank at your back, and unless you can hold out for a long time." Well, then, I ask him how it was he had managed to make his money; and he can't help telling me the truth. He was dead broke, Liz, in a worse fix than I'm

in now—ay, a thousand times worse—he has told me so lots of times; but he stuck to it until on one race he had taken a bet of a thousand pounds to ten, and his horse won. There he was, all right in a minute. He was a made man directly the horse passed the winning-post. He told me how he threw his hat in the air, and how he almost danced for joy. Then the money began to roll in. That's how it is, Liz. You've only got to stick to it long enough, and to keep your heart up.'

'Do you bet with any of Mr. Sheldrake's friends, Alf?'

'With one—Con Staveley.'

Lizzie repeated, under her breath, 'Con Staveley!' as if desiring to fix the name in her memory.

'He's a good fellow, too, is Con. He gives me long odds—longer than I should be able to get from any other of the commission agents or from any of the clubs. One of these days I shall give him a nip, as sure as fate. He has told me so, often, laughingly. "You'll nip me one of these fine days, Alf," he said; "and I shall have to hand you over a big cheque. Well, you may as well have it as anybody else." And I mean to have it, Liz. If I don't make it out of the City and

Suburban, I'll make it out of the Derby. Would you like to go to the Derby, Liz?

'And so,' concluded Alfred, when he came to the end of his story, which he had told and coloured in such a way as to make it appear that it was only by an extraordinary combination of ill-chances that he was not 'rolling in money' at the present time, 'you see where my chance lies. I shall be sure to come up all right, if I go on. And I *must* go on, Liz; that's a fact. It's my only chance. And as Mr. Sheldrake can shut me up at any minute, I must be careful not to offend him. I want you to be civil to him, for my sake, if you won't for his own.'

'I'll try to, Alf.'

'That's a dear! I can't understand why you are so bitter against him. At one time you were always praising him; and you've some reason to be thankful to him. I'm sure he's been very kind to you and Mr. Musgrave.'

'It looks so,' said Lizzie thoughtfully, 'outwardly.'

She said no more; for she was keen enough to see that many conflicting influences were at work. That Alfred was blind to Mr. Sheldrake's character was plain; and, indeed, the feeling she

entertained against him was really nothing more than a matter of prejudice. But her instincts were dead against him; and she thoroughly distrusted him. There is often in woman's character a sort of unreasoning reason, to the whisperings of which she tenaciously clings, even though outward evidence almost surely prove it to be based upon false grounds. And in the majority of instances, the instinct which prompts this refusal of direct evidence is correct. Mr. Sheldrake had become Lizzie's Doctor Fell; and she judged him accordingly.

The conversation she had had with Alfred this night set her thinking more seriously. She yearned to set matters right; but turn which way she did, one obstacle started up constantly before her—Mr. Sheldrake. He seemed to hold them all in his power by the relations which existed between him and Alfred. As she thought of the terrible blow he could inflict upon them all, she began to hate him. Alfred was powerless; Lily was powerless; Mr. Musgrave was powerless. Lizzie had a large share of woman's wit and cunning, and much confidence in herself. In her musings now, Mr. Sheldrake presented himself to her in the light of a foe to her dearest hopes, as

one who was weaving treacherous webs around her friends ; and she found herself watching him, and looking about her for some means to break the threads, and so defeat him. ' If I had some one to help me,' she thought, ' some man to depend upon who is not in Mr. Sheldrake's power. Felix!' She started ; for the name had come so suddenly upon her, and with such vivid force, as to make her almost fancy that she had really heard it spoken. Felix ! The man of all others whom she would have chosen ; the man of all others upon whom she could best depend. The thought of him gave her such hope and comfort, that she kissed Alfred tenderly. He returned her caress, and called her a dear good girl, and told her how he loved her.

Mr. Musgrave, who was waiting up for Lizzie, heard the sound of the cab wheels, and ran to the gate.

' Will you come inside, Alfred ?' he asked.

' No, thank you, I will bid Lizzie good-night here.' .

' I'll be in presently, daddy,' said Lizzie, with a kiss, which sent the old man into the house with a light heart.

As the lovers stood together in the quiet night, some better influences, born of the peace

which surrounded him and of the consciousness of the love which Lizzie bore towards him, entered Alfred's heart, and he experienced a genuine feeling of regret for the folly of the past. It had floated him on to rocks so perilous that his liberty was endangered and his honour was lost. How much better had it been for him and all of them had he avoided the fatal snares! 'Let me but once get free,' he thought, 'and I will take care not to be caught again.' In this way do all weak natures repent the consequences of their folly. What was bad in Alfred's nature sprang out of his weakness; his very selfishness only asserted itself when he was in trouble—but then, indeed, it asserted itself with such strength as to sweep aside every other consideration, and as to make it impossible for him to recognise the danger he might inflict on those he loved in his efforts to free himself from the net he had woven for himself.

The lovers did not part for nearly an hour. The little that Lizzie said to Alfred soothed and comforted him, and when he bade her the last good-night, and gave her the last kiss, he was in a quieter and better mood than he was when they quitted the theatre.

'Will Lily be asleep when you get home, Alf?' asked Lizzie.

'I should think so, Liz.'

'And I should think not so, Alf,' said Lizzie, half gaily, half sadly. 'See. When you are at home, knock at her door, and if she is awake, give her this kiss from me.'

She watched Alfred till he was out of sight, then went indoors, where Mr. Musgrave was patiently waiting for her.

'Did you enjoy yourself, Lizzie?'

'Yes—no,' replied Lizzie, taking off her hat and mantle. 'It isn't a very lively piece, and Lily was ill. Why, how pale you've turned, daddy! She was better before we left her. It was the piece made her ill, I think.'

'Tell me more about it, Lizzie; she was well when she went to the theatre?'

'O, yes, and we thought we were going to enjoy ourselves very much. And so we should have done if the play had been a lively one. But it was horrible. I wouldn't go to see it again for ever so much. Well, and the theatre was very hot, and the last scene was so dreadful that Lily fainted. She soon recovered, and we all went to Soho in one cab.'

‘That was right, Lizzie.’

‘Yes,’ said Lizzie, with assumed carelessness, but watching the old man keenly, ‘it was my doing, that was. Mr. Sheldrake wanted to walk home with Lily, and wanted me and Alfred to start off at once in a cab from the theatre—but I wouldn’t have it so. I insisted that we should all go together, and that we should drop Lily at her door. Mr. Sheldrake wasn’t very pleased. To tell you the truth, daddy, I think I rather set him against me to-night. Do you mind?’

Such a concentrated look of watchfulness did she flash into his face that it would have startled him to see. But as he did not see, he could only answer her spoken words.

‘No, my dear, I don’t mind; but it will be as well not to quarrel with him, if you can help it.’

‘I’ll try not to, for all our sakes. He would be a dangerous enemy, wouldn’t he, daddy?’

‘Yes, my dear; very dangerous.’

‘So if we know he *is* our enemy we shall have to behave cunningly towards him; we shall have to be on our guard. To be civil to him to his face, and ready to tear him to pieces directly we get a chance.’

There was so much excitement in her words

and manner that Mr. Musgrave looked at her in uneasy amazement. She walked about the room restlessly, with a bright flame in her cheeks. Presently she grew calmer, and sat down by the table, on which supper was laid. There was trouble in her face, and it brought trouble into his.

'Take some supper, Lizzie; we will talk afterwards.'

'No, we will talk now. I can't eat any supper. Mr. Sheldrake wanted us to go with him to some supper-rooms, but I wouldn't hear of it. Was I right?'

'Quite right.'

'So that I've been twice right to-night, and this enemy of ours with the curled moustaches has been twice wrong.'

'You seem to be very much set against Mr. Sheldrake, my dear.'

'*Seem* to be! I am. There isn't much seeming about. I mean every word I say, and a good deal more. Tell me—do you like him?'

'He's my employer, Lizzie, and could turn us out of this house any day he chose.'

'And could do many other hard things—and would, and will, if he's thwarted; so we must

be cunning, and must enter into a league against him. Shake hands upon it.' And she held out her hand earnestly to him. 'Shake hands upon it!' she repeated, almost vehemently.

'Child, child!' he said sorrowfully. 'I take your hand, and kiss it because I love you, and because I feel that your words convey a deeper meaning than they express. But I am an old man, and I have seen trouble, and have felt its bitter experiences. I would not willingly encourage you in what may bring bad consequences to both of us.'

'Not if we are wary, daddy—not if we are cunning. You don't know how I am wrought up! You don't know what prompts me to speak so! Ah, daddy! Do you remember my telling you, when you first opened out the prospect of this pretty little cottage to me, that I was wilful, and might tease you a good deal, and that for that reason you had better consider very seriously whether it would do for you and me to live together as you proposed? I don't know whether to be thankful or sorry that I consented. I was very happy then—very, very happy.'

'You did it for my sake, Lizzie,' he said humbly.

‘Not altogether; I did it a good deal for my own. I thought how nice it would be for Alfred.’

She covered her face with her hands to hide the tears that she could not keep back.

‘You took pity on my lonely life, Lizzie, and I bless you for it, my child! You have brought much happiness to me, and things have occurred to me since then—such wonderful things.’

She looked up, with the tears in her eyes.

‘What wonderful things, daddy?’

‘That is my secret, my dear,’ he said sadly. ‘You do not know the history of my past life. The time may come—and soon—when you will learn it. I have become a better man, I hope, since we came to live here. Sit by me, child, and tell me your trouble.’

She seated herself on a stool at his feet, and took his hand and caressed it.

‘And you have a secret, too,’ she murmured, ‘and a new one. We all of us have secrets, I think, that we are keeping from one another.’

‘All of us! Have you a secret that you keep from me?’

‘Yes, daddy; and one that I must not tell anybody, not even you. I have promised. You

must not ask me any questions about it, for I cannot answer them.'

'Very well, my dear. But tell me the reason of your feeling against Mr. Sheldrake.'

'Suppose you knew that he could destroy the happiness of the one you loved best in the world—suppose you knew that he was ready to use that power if you crossed him in any of his bad ways.'

'That is all supposing, Lizzie.'

'It is reality to me. Mr. Sheldrake has Alfred in his power, and can ruin him any minute he pleases. Alfred told me so to-night. O daddy, daddy! I am unhappy and miserable, and I don't know which way to turn if you will not help me.'

'I will help you, child, in any way that I can. Does Alfred owe Mr. Sheldrake money?'

'Yes—more than he can pay.'

'How has that come about?'

'You must not tell anybody. Alfred would be angry. Alfred has lost the money in betting on horses.'

Mr. Musgrave started. The business that was conducted in Ivy Cottage was conducted in so secret a manner that Lizzie did not know its

nature. She had been curious about it, and once or twice had asked the old man; but he had laughingly evaded her, and it was she who had dubbed the room in which he and Mr. Sheldrake were often closeted together for so long a time the Bluebeard's room.

'Does he bet with Mr. Sheldrake, Lizzie?'

'No—with a man named Con Staveley.'

The guilty look that stole into Mr. Musgrave's face bore no meaning to Lizzie's sense. Some part of the scheme was now revealed to him. Mr. Sheldrake lent Alfred money, which he received back through Con Staveley; and he himself perhaps had been an unconscious instrument in Mr. Sheldrake's hands, and had assisted in Alfred's entanglement. But what could be Mr. Sheldrake's motive? There was nothing to be gained from Alfred, who had no money and no expectations. Knowing Mr. Sheldrake thoroughly, Mr. Musgrave knew well that there must be some deep motive at the bottom of all this. The old man had parts of the chain in his hand, but the important link was wanting. Could Lizzie supply it?

'Have Alfred and Mr. Sheldrake been friends for a very long time, Lizzie?'

'No, daddy; not twelve months, I think.'

'How did they become acquainted?'

'I don't quite know, but I suspect it was through Lily.'

'Through Lily!' echoed the old man, almost in a whisper.

'I think that Mr. Sheldrake lends Alfred money because of her. I think—no, I don't think; I am sure—that Mr. Sheldrake wants Lily to be fond of him.'

Lizzie was frightened at the white face which met her gaze. A terrible fear smote the old man dumb for a time. The missing link was found! This Mr. Sheldrake—this man without principle, without honour, without heart—had designs upon the tender girl who had brought light into the old man's life. Lizzie had indeed found a friend in her design—how eager and willing a friend she little knew—but one whose motive for aiding her was so strong as to overleap every other consideration in life.

'You are ill, daddy!' she cried.

'No, no, my child,' he replied; 'keep silent for a little while.'

He rose and paced the room, and Lizzie's anxious eyes watched him. What were his thoughts

during the silence that followed he did not reveal. But a new strength seemed to have entered into him, and he paused before his adopted child with a determination in his face which robbed him of many years.

‘Answer my questions, Lizzie,’ he said, ‘without asking for reasons. First let me tell you that when you brought Lily here as your friend, I was glad. I have grown to love her, as well as I love you, child. Has she any affection for Mr. Shel-drake?’

‘No!’ Very decided and emphatic was Lizzie’s reply.

‘Thank God for it! He is unworthy of her. You speak as if you knew.’

‘How do girls learn each other’s secrets, daddy? Lily has never told me, although I have tried to coax her a hundred times. She loves another man. I know this as well as I know that I love Alfred with all my heart and soul.’

‘A good man, Lizzie?’

‘One of the best of men, daddy.’

‘Do not answer carelessly, child. I have a stake in this, perhaps as deep and as strong as yours.’

‘I do not answer carelessly, daddy. Your

manner gives me such hope! I am so glad I have spoken to-night. The man she loves and who loves her, I am sure, is one to be honoured — a man worthy of any girl, worthy even of Lily.'

'You asked me to give you my hand a little while ago, my dear. I give it to you now in the way that you wished.'

There was something solemn in the manner in which he held out his hand to her; and something altogether so new and earnest in him, that it stirred her to deeper feeling, as his hand closed over hers.

'Now for Alfred,' he said; 'do you know if he bets in his own name?'

'He has never told me.'

'You have some letters of his?'

'Yes, daddy.'

'It is time for you to go to bed, my dear. I want to see Alfred's writing. I will come up with you, and you will give me one or two of his letters. Trust me, child, I have a good reason for what I am doing. So now, kiss me, and let us go upstairs.'

He kissed her at her bedroom door again, when she gave him the letters.

'We'll try and be a match for this enemy of ours, Lizzie,' he said.

'O daddy,' she answered, with a bright look, 'you have made my heart light !'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GOOD COUNSEL.

THE cab was turning the corner of the little street in Soho in which Lily lived, and Lily was about to ring the door-bell, when Mr. Sheldrake laid his hand on her wrist, and said :

‘Let me have a few minutes’ conversation with you to-night. I beg it as a favour.’

Not daring for Alfred’s sake to refuse, Lily tremblingly suggested that they should go indoors and talk ; but Mr. Sheldrake said, in a tone that was half decided and half imploring :

‘I cannot speak to you in the house.’

She raised her eyes to his face for an explanation, and he answered the look.

‘Your grandfather is not my friend.’

‘But that is not grandfather’s fault,’ she said loyally.

‘I do not say it is ; it is my misfortune, perhaps. He is not so much a friend of Alfred’s as he should be.’

'How can you say that?' asked Lily, with a beating heart. 'You are wrong—very wrong; grandfather loves Alfred.'

'I only judge from what Alfred has told me. So far as regards myself, of course, I can see that your grandfather is not over cordial to me. He has no right to be otherwise; I have been a good friend to his grandson, and I deserve some better return.'

'I know, I know, Mr. Sheldrake,' said Lily earnestly. 'Alfred has told me of your kindness to him. I am very grateful to you for it, believe me.'

'Well, then,' rejoined Mr. Sheldrake briskly, 'you can scarcely refuse me the small favour of a few minutes' quiet conversation with you—although I accept it as a great favour? It is a fine night, and, after the heat of the theatre, the air will do you no harm.'

She had no power to refuse, and they turned slowly from the door. Near to the house was an arched avenue which led to one of the larger thoroughfares. Not many persons were stirring in this quiet courtway, and thither Mr. Sheldrake led Lily.

'If we walk up and down slowly,' he said, 'our

talking together at this time of night will not attract attention. Pray take my arm.'

She laid her hand lightly on his sleeve, and waited anxiously for his next words.

'I hope,' he said, looking into her face with an expression of tender solicitude, 'that the effects of your faintness have quite passed away.'

'Yes, thank you. It was very stupid of me to give way so.'

'You must not say that. You could not help it. And you are the last person, I am sure, to give pain to your friends.'

She raised her eyes to his.

'It pained me exceedingly to see you overcome, and I could not help reproaching myself for being the innocent cause of your suffering.'

'You were not to know that I was so weak; you did not know what kind of a play it was we were going to see.'

'Thank you, Miss Lily,' he said eagerly, 'thank you. You do me greater justice than your friend Lizzie did. I think she must be ungrateful.'

'No, indeed,' said Lily warmly. 'She is the very reverse of that. You must not speak ill of Lizzie, Mr. Sheldrake.'

'Your wish is law,' he replied gallantly; 'but

if she is not ungrateful, I am the most unfortunate of men, for I have by some unaccountable means incurred the displeasure of two persons whom you love—your grandfather and Lizzie.'

He paused here, anticipating, and wishing, that Lily would have replied to this, but she was silent.

'And the mystery is, that both have good reason to behave differently towards me, to think better of me, for they must know that I have stood a good friend to Alfred. You know that.'

'Yes.'

'We entered into a compact, if you remember—you and I—to work together for Alfred's good. You *do* remember it, do you not?'

'Yes.'

'That was at Bushey Park. It is one of the pleasantest days in my remembrance. Well, now, I've tried to perform my part in the compact. I've stood Alfred's friend through thick and thin—it might sound boastful, if I said that very few men would have stuck to him as I have done. However, I can take no credit to myself for doing so; he has you to thank for it—only you. Why, here am I repeating the very words I said to you on the day we entered into partnership!'

His treacherous hand closed upon hers with a tender pressure which made her shiver. Not so much in the words he had spoken, but in the manner of their utterance, he made her understand that he held Alfred's safety—perhaps his life—in his hand, and she felt that if she repulsed him Alfred would be made to suffer. He released her presently, and encouraged by her submission his treacherous arms would have stolen round her waist. But instinctively she evaded the embrace, and stood apart from him. Had her life depended upon it, she could not have acted otherwise. At this moment a man passed through the archway. Mr. Sheldrake's back was towards the man, who, with a keen observance of Lily's attitude, walked slowly onwards in the direction of Lily's home. Mr. Sheldrake waited until the man was out of hearing before he spoke again.

'I hope I have not frightened you by telling you that very few men would have stood by Alfred as I have done, Miss Lily?' How strong the armour of modesty is, was never better shown than in the fact that the man of the world had not yet found courage to address her simply by her Christian name. 'But it is a fact, I assure

you. I daresay Alfred has confided in you, and has told you some of his troubles ?'

'I don't know the exact nature of them ; I only know that he is very much harassed.'

'Perhaps it is better,' said Mr. Sheldrake significantly, 'that your knowledge should go no farther. I am afraid that he has been very injudicious—it is a mild phrase, but I would not distress you by using a harsher term. Let us say that he has been injudicious, indiscreet. Well, what then ? So long as you and I remain true to our compact, he is safe. There is comfort in that knowledge, is there not ?'

'Mr. Sheldrake,' said Lily, in an agony of alarm, 'is Alfred in danger ?'

'Not while we stand by him. Do not needlessly distress yourself. We'll see him through it, you and I. Many a young fellow has been wrecked through want of a friend—but Alfred has two. Shall I tell you what makes me so earnest in his cause ?'

'No,' she replied hurriedly, and looking round as if for help ; 'not to-night. It is late, and grandfather will be anxious about me. Some other time.'

'What if some other time should be too late ?'

he questioned pitilessly. 'You ask me whether he is in danger, and almost in the same breath you show unkindness to the only friend who has it in his power to pull him through his difficulties. I make no boast of being his friend—it is the simple truth. And what should there be to displease you in the knowledge that I am your brother's friend because of the feeling I entertain for you? A girl should be thankful—I will not speak of gratitude—to be in this way the guardian and protector of her brother.'

'I am grateful, Mr. Sheldrake, indeed, indeed I am!'

'You have a strange way of showing it, Miss Lily. Pardon me, if I seem to speak harshly, but I am deeply wounded by your conduct, and by the conduct of others who should show a better regard for Alfred's position. Your grandfather is cold to me—Alfred's sweetheart misjudges me; but I could forgive these, if you were kind. It is due to my self-respect—which I cannot forfeit, not even to win your good opinion—to ask you again whether I may tell you what makes me so earnest in your brother's cause?'

Thus miserably constrained, Lily whispered, 'Yes,' in a faint tone, knowing what was coming,

and dreading it. Mr. Sheldrake dropped his voice to the requisite pitch of tenderness, and prepared to make his avowal.

‘I saw you first by accident, Miss Lily. I was passing the Royal White Rose Music-hall one evening—it was in June of last year, a night I shall never forget—and having a spare half-hour I dropped in. Almost as I entered, you came upon the stage, and from that moment it seemed to me that my fate was fixed. Such an impression did your sweet face make upon me that I drove to the hall on the following evening, and being acquainted with Storks the manager, we spoke together about you. You remember on that night I threw you a bouquet—I brought it especially for the pretty girl who had made such an impression upon me—and after the performance I came to the back of the stage, and had the pleasure of being introduced to you. I saw that you were too good for such a place—that you were in every way different from the usual run of music-hall performers—and you must take the blame on yourself for having attracted me in such a manner. It is not many girls who have done so—nay, no other has ever produced a similar impression upon me. From that moment I began to love you.’

He did not appear to be aware that the very words he employed in declaring his love showed of what base material it was composed. His speech flowed smoothly, and he mentally congratulated himself upon his skill in delivering it. There was no tremor in his voice, for the situation was not new to him. He had delivered himself of artificial love-phrases to a score of girls in his time, and he had become practised in the art; but he was compelled to acknowledge to himself that never had he found conquest so difficult as this—which gave it without doubt a keener zest, and made him as artificially earnest as it was in his false nature to be.

Lily listened tremblingly. It was the first avowal of love that had ever been made to her, and it met with no response in her heart. But thought of Alfred's peril compelled her attention. Encouraged by her silence, Mr. Sheldrake proceeded.

‘I saw you home that night, and after lingering about the street long after you entered the house—see what an impression you made upon me!—it was my good fortune to make the acquaintance of your brother. He has told you of the circumstance probably?’

He paused for her reply, and she gave it.

‘Yes.’ Faintly whispered, as if it were wrung from her.

‘He was in some difficulty, and I was enabled to get him out of it. I was attracted to him by his voice and by his resemblance to you. An acquaintanceship sprang up between us, and it has been in my power to assist him on many occasions. I have done so, as you know, for your sake, and because I love you. There is no need for me to say more. There is one reward I have looked forward to for befriending your brother, and whom I shall continue to befriend if I can hope to find some place in your affection——’

He placed his arm around her, and so overpowered was she by her inward conflict of feeling, that she had no power to resist. But at this critical moment a quick step was heard coming into the archway. Lily turned with a gasp of relief, and seeing who it was that was approaching them, involuntarily cried in a joyful tone,

‘Felix!’

And made a movement towards him.

Felix raised his hat, and said :

‘Your grandfather is anxious about you, Miss Lily.’

‘Have you seen him to-night?’ asked Lily.

‘Yes; I have been to see *The Bells*, and he told me that you had gone to the same theatre. He expected you would have been home before this time.’

‘Miss Lily was in perfectly safe keeping, sir,’ said Mr. Sheldrake, biting his lip with vexation at the interruption, and with jealousy at Lily’s more cordial manner towards Felix.

‘I make no question of it,’ replied Felix politely. ‘Her grandfather must be satisfied of that, but I think he expected Alfred would bring his sister home.’

‘I will come at once,’ said Lily. ‘Alfred has gone to see Lizzie home.’

Felix offered his arm, and Lily was about to accept it, when Mr. Sheldrake interposed.

‘I would like you to assure this person, Miss Lily, that there was no cause for alarm.’

In a very lofty manner indeed did Mr. Sheldrake make this request.

‘Indeed, no assurance is necessary,’ said Felix, with the intention of sparing Lily.

But Mr. Sheldrake would not be denied.

‘I asked the lady, sir.’

‘There was no cause for alarm, Felix.’

'One word before you go,' said Mr. Sheldrake.

Obedient to her look, Felix fell back a pace or two.

'I will not intrude farther upon you to-night, for I see that you are fatigued and anxious. Of course you will keep what has passed between us an entire secret. For Alfred's sake. Out of consideration for you, I have not told you how serious his position is; I do not wish to alarm you unnecessarily. But you and I, working together, will be able to set him straight.'

He pressed her hand tenderly as he wished her good-night; and as she took Felix's arm, he shaped with his lips the warning words, 'For Alfred's sake,' and turned away without a word to Felix. Before Lily and her protector arrived at the house, Lily said:

'I want you not to let grandfather know about my talking to Mr. Sheldrake.'

'I will say nothing, Lily. You are not angry that I came?'

'No; I am glad—very, very glad.' And added anxiously: 'I have not done anything wrong in stopping to speak to Mr. Sheldrake.'

'I know that, Lily; but don't say anything more about it.'

‘I must. I cannot bear that you should think ill of me; and it has so strange an appearance that any one less generous than you would require an explanation, and that I cannot give.’

‘If I say I am satisfied, and that I hold you in too perfect esteem to think ill of you in any way—that I know you have troubles which you are compelled to keep to your own breast, because they affect others more than yourself—will that content you?’

She answered yes, and he gave her the assurance in other words.

‘I have a confession to make before we go in, Lily.’

‘You, Felix!’

‘Yes; I have told an untruth, but one which, I think, may be pardoned. I have not been to your house since eight o’clock. I saw your grandfather then, and he told me you had gone to see *The Bells*, and appeared anxious about you. I was anxious, also, for I did not care that you should see such a piece.’

Lily shuddered. ‘It was dreadful, Felix! Did you know that I fainted?’

‘No; I noticed that you were very pale?’

‘You were watching me, Felix?’

‘Yes, Lily; I was at the back of the pit and could just see your box.’

Lily experienced an exquisite delight at this confession. He had come to the theatre expressly to watch over her. Involuntarily she held out her hand to him, and allowed it to remain in his grasp.

‘I knew when you came out of the theatre, Lily,’ he continued, ‘and when I came towards you just now, and you asked me if I had been at home with your grandfather, I saw no other way of avoiding an unpleasant explanation with Mr. Sheldrake than to say what was not exactly true. If you can say sincerely that you forgive me for the subterfuge, you will relieve my mind and make me feel less culpable.’

‘No forgiveness can be necessary, Felix, when the only feeling I have is one of gratitude that you came when you did.’

‘Thank you; I am more than sufficiently rewarded. Now I am going to say something to you, which may need forgiveness; but I depend upon your generous nature not to misjudge me. My words are prompted by sincerity and pure esteem, Lily. Shall I go on?’

‘Yes,’ she answered, looking him earnestly in

the face. There was so much truthfulness in her gaze, that he could have taken her to his arms there and then, believing that she would have found comfort in that shelter, knowing that it would be to him the greatest happiness earth could afford. But he mastered the impulse with manly resolve, and with a tender and chivalrous regard for her weakness. There was no fear, no doubt, in her face; she knew she could trust him; all the bright dreams of her youth were embodied in him, and would ever be, though the dear realisation of them might never, never come. He was her knight, in the truest sense of the word.

‘You are but a child, Lily,’ he said, ‘inexperienced in the world’s hard ways, and bringing only to your aid, in any difficulty you may be labouring under, a simple heart, unused to the artifice and cunning which surround us. I have learnt something of the world in my struggle; and although I have not learned to condemn it—for there is much that is beautiful in it, Lily—I have learned that it is often necessary to arm yourself with weapons that you despise, if you would save yourself from hurt. In battling with the world, a man must not wear his heart upon his sleeve—there are too many vultures about—he must not

oppose a bare breast to foes whose breasts are mailed. I am expressing myself in this way, so as to make you understand that I—who, I would have you believe, despise meanness and unworthiness as heartily as it is in the power of man to do—feel the necessity of using weapons in life's battle which I would fain throw aside. There is nothing more noble than simplicity of heart—I worship it wherever I see it—but it is a weak weapon, as the world goes, and in most cases, where it is relied on solely, it becomes woefully bruised. Say that you are in any trouble, that any cloud hangs over your life, that you are threatened by storms which you see approaching to you nearer and nearer—how can *you* meet them, Lily? What weapons have you at your command to save yourself from the peril? Simplicity, innocence, self-sacrifice! Relying only on these and on yourself, the storm breaks, and then——'

He paused, and Lily did not speak. How precious his words were to her! How skilfully and delicately had he contrived to tell her that her happiness was dear to him! His voice was like music to her heart.

'Then, Lily,' he resumed, 'think what occurs. It may be that I am wrong in my fears. How

happy it would make me to know that it is so! But if I am right, think what may occur. You may bring misery not only to yourself but to others. You are moved by this thought, I see. Has it never occurred to you before? You have at home two whom you love—your brother and your grandfather. There is no need for me to say how dearly your grandfather loves you, and what anguish you may bring upon him if you allow suffering to come on yourself unprepared. In both your brother and your grandfather you should confide, and from your grandfather's larger experience of the world, and from his whole-hearted love for his dear child, good counsel would surely come, if counsel be needed. I should say, if I were asked, that were I in your place and needed counsel, I should deem it a matter of duty, as it is equally a matter of affection, to seek for it in one whose riper years qualify him for giving it, and whose life of love for his child is a sufficient warrant for his sincerity. I should say more than this, Lily, if you would allow me, and if you are not displeased with me——'

'Go on, Felix. I honour you for what you are saying.'

'I should say, were I in your place and in

such a position as I have hinted at, that I should fail in my duty and my love if I neglected to take him into my confidence, and that, in that case, doubts might well arise in his mind——’

‘Of my love for him, Felix!’ interrupted Lily, with all the earnestness of her nature. ‘No, no; do not say that!’

‘I might have been harsh enough to use these very words, if I did not know that good old man’s heart. Cling to him and to his love, dear Lily; do not throw him aside in your trouble. It is the dearest privilege of affection to share the troubles of those we love. If I were married’—his voice trembled slightly here—‘the first consoling thought that would arise to my mind should misfortune overtake me would be, “Thank God, I have one at home who will sympathise with me and, by her sympathy, console me!”’

Had Felix been the most cunning of men, and had he carefully studied every word he wished to say, he could not have made a more successful appeal. Such strength is there in sincerity and in honesty of purpose! If anything had been wanting to make him inexpressibly dear to the girl he loved so loyally, to make her cherish him (as she did) in her heart of hearts, he had supplied

it. But he had no thought of that ; he had spoken out of perfect singleness of motive.

‘So now,’ he said, in a lighter tone, ‘my lecture being over, and knowing, as I know, that you are not hurt or offended with me for speaking as I have done, we will go in to your grandfather. I look upon myself as a very conspirator—pretending to be anxious that you should be at home, and keeping you in the night air for my own selfish purpose !’

He raised his hand to the bell, and Lily caught it and kissed it. She felt no shame in the action, no more than a little child might have done ; but the soft touch of her lips thrilled through Felix, and so powerful a happiness filled his heart, as he thought of what might be in the future for him and for her, that a mist floated before his eyes. The next moment he raised her hand to his lips, and returned the homage with the respect and devotion of a true and faithful knight.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MR. PODMORE WISHES TO BE INSTRUCTED UPON THE
DOCTRINE OF RESPONSIBILITY, AND DECLARES
THAT HE HAS A PRESENTIMENT.

EVENTFUL as this night had been to Lily, and destined as it was to live for ever in her memory, it was pregnant with yet deeper meaning for her future, and an event was to occur which was to draw closer together the links of the chain of pure and unworthy love which bound her. On this night she saw clearly what before had been but dimly presentable to her. She saw that Felix loved her; and also that Mr. Sheldrake had a passion for her. She was instinctively conscious that there was nothing in common in the sentiments of these two men. Their feelings for her were as wide apart as were their characters; and she had already estimated these correctly, although she did not realise the depth of baseness from which Mr. Sheldrake's passion sprung. She was too pure and innocent for that.

When the party left for the theatre, old Wheels found the time pass slowly enough, and for the purpose of whirling away a few minutes, he went up to Gribble junior's room, and found that worthy man and his wife working cheerfully as usual. Gribble junior's father, the victim of coöperative stores, was sitting in a corner nursing the baby, and had as usual been descanting upon the evils of coöperation, when old Wheels entered. Mr. and Mrs. Gribble junior were laughing heartily at something their father had just uttered.

'What do you think we're laughing at, Mr. Wheels?' asked Gribble junior, as the old man sat down.

Old Wheels expressed a desire to be enlightened.

'Father just said, that he supposed they would be trying next to bring babies into the world by coöperation.'

At which, of course, the laughter recommenced.

'Why not?' grumbled Gribble senior. 'You can buy pap at the stores, and you can buy coffins. Mind, John, when I'm dead, get my coffin made by an honest tradesman. If you was

to buy one at a coöperative store, I shouldn't rest in my grave.'

'Time enough for that, father,' replied Gribble junior, in a business-like tone, and yet with affection; 'you're good for twenty years yet, I hope and trust.'

'I should be, John, if trade was allowed to go on in a proper way. But coöperation'll be the death of me long before my proper time.'

'My girl's gone to the theatre,' observed old Wheels, to change the subject.

'It'll do her good,' said Mrs. Gribble; 'she's been looking pale of late.'

'I'm going to take father to the Music Hall to-night,' said Gribble junior. 'He's never been to one. You see, Mr. Wheels, what I complain of in father is, that he won't keep moving.'

'It's too late, John; it's too late. My joints are stiff.'

'Perhaps so, but there's no occasion to make 'em stiffer. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. Go in for everything, I say—go in for work, and go in for play; and keep moving. How do you think baby's looking, Mr. Wheels?'

Old Wheels pinched the baby's cheek, and

said gaily that the coöperative store couldn't turn out a baby like that.

'Do you hear that, father?' cried Mrs. Gribble junior, with a merry laugh. 'Do you hear that?'

'Mr. Wheels is quite right,' replied Gribble senior, faithful to his theories; 'it ain't likely that anything good and wholesome can come out of coöperation.'

'How's trade, Mr. Gribble?'

'Well, it's no use grumbling, but it ain't as good as it should be. I had an idea yesterday, though. It was raining, you know, and I had no jobs on hand. The hospital ain't as full as it ought to be. I went out in the rain yesterday with three new umbrellas under my arm, and one over my head. What for, now? you'll ask. To sell 'em? no; people never buy umbrellas in rainy weather of their own accord; they always wait for a fine day. No; I had an idea, and I carried it out in this way. I saw a respectable man, with an umbrella over his head that wanted mending. I followed him home, and just as he knocked at his door, I went up to him, and said I was an umbrella-maker, and would like the job of mending his umbrella. "But I've only got this one," he said, "and I want to go out again." "I'm prepared for that, sir," I said;

"here's my card, and here's a new umbrella as good as yours. I'll leave this with you to use till I bring back your own, properly mended." He was tickled at the idea, and was more tickled when I told him that, trade being slack, I had come out on purpose to look out for umbrellas that wanted mending. "You're an industrious fellow," he said, with a laugh. "Yes, sir," I answered, "if work won't come to you, you must go to work. Keep moving, that's my motto. If you can't get work, make it." Well, he gave me his second-hand umbrella, and took my new one. In this way, in less than three hours, I got rid of my four new umbrellas, and got four jobs. I took them back this afternoon, and—would you believe it, Mr. Wheels?—not only did I get paid well for the jobs, but two of the gentlemen bought two of my new umbrellas, and said I deserved to be encouraged. And I think I do,' added Gribble junior complacently. 'I made a good job of that idea, and I daresay it'll bring me in some money. You see, an umbrella is such an awkward thing to get mended, when it's out of order. Not one person out of twenty knows where to take it to. Well, go to them. I hope it'll rain to-morrow.'

When old Wheels was in his room again, it

was natural that his thoughts should dwell much on the conversation that had taken place between himself and Lily. It brought the past before him, and he was painfully startled by the resemblance which the present crisis in the life of his darling bore to that other event in the life of her mother which had wrecked the happiness of that unhappy woman. He opened the cupboard, and saw the little iron box. Very sad were the thoughts it suggested as he brought it to the table and opened it. There was a little money in it, sufficient for a few weeks' expenses of their humble home; two or three mementos of Lily, such as a piece of ribbon and a flower she had worn in her hair; and some old letters and papers worn and faded. He took them from the box, and sadly read one and another. Among them were letters from Lily's father to her mother during their days of courtship; and certain terms of expression in them brought to him the remembrance of sentiments almost similarly expressed by Alfred. The same vague declarations of being able to make large sums of money by unexplained means; the same selfishness, the same boastfulness, were there embodied. But not the same remorse which Alfred had already experienced; that was to come after-

wards, and the despair which ever accompanies it. 'We were happy then, my daughter and I,' the old man murmured; 'happy before he came. My daughter's life might not have ended as it did, in misery; might not have been passed, as it was, in miserable repinings. He brought a blight upon us.' And then came the thought, 'Like father, like son.' He paced the room with disturbed steps. 'Alfred's father,' he thought, 'wrecked the happiness of the woman who loved him, who trusted implicitly in him—wrecked the happiness of my daughter, who was once as bright as my darling Lily. And how she changed under the consequence of his vice and his folly! How she drooped, and drooped, until life became torture! As she trusted him and believed in him, and sacrificed herself for him, so Lily trusts and believes and is ready to sacrifice herself for Alfred. Shall I allow her to do this blindly? The end would not be the same, for Lily could not live through it. How can I save my darling? Would it not be better to inflict a sharp pain upon her now, than to see her walk blindly, confidently, lovingly, to a desolate future?' At this point of his musings he heard the street-door open and shut, and heard a stumbling step in the passage

below. Looking over the papers in the iron box, he came upon two which he opened and read. They were the last two documents connected with the career of Lily's father. One was a full quit-tance for a sum of money which the unhappy man had embezzled; the wording of the other was as follows:

'In consideration of my father-in-law paying the money due to Mr. James Creamwell, which I have wrongfully used, I solemnly promise not to trouble my wife with my presence as long as I live, and not to make myself known to my children in the future, should we meet by any chance. For the wrong that I have done, I humbly ask their forgiveness.

RICHARD MANNING.'

'He has kept his word,' mused old Wheels; 'from that time I have never seen him, never heard of him. No one but I have ever read this paper, unless Alfred, when he took the money from this box—— But no; he could have had no thought for anything but his unhappy purpose.'

Old Wheels was interrupted in his musings by the whining of a dog at the door. 'That's Snap's voice,' he said, and going to the door, he saw the

faithful dog waiting for him. Snap, directly he saw the old man, looked into his face appealingly, and walked towards the stairs. Old Wheels, taking the candle, followed the dog down-stairs, and found Jim Podmore asleep at the bottom. Snap, having fulfilled his mission, waited patiently for the old man to act.

'Come, Mr. Podmore,' said old Wheels, gently shaking the sleeping man; 'you mustn't sleep here. Come up-stairs, and get to bed.'

The tired man murmured 'All right,' and settled himself comfortably to continue his nap. But old Wheels shook him more roughly, and he rose to his feet wearily, and leaning against the wall, seemed disposed to fall asleep again in that position.

'Come, pull yourself together,' urged old Wheels, taking Jim Podmore's arm; 'you'll be more comfortable in your own room than here.'

Thus advised, and being well shaken, Jim 'pulled himself together,' and with many incoherent apologies, accompanied old Wheels up-stairs. When he arrived at the first landing, he appeared to think he had gone far enough, and quite naturally he stumbled into the old man's room, and fell into a chair.

'I am not going to allow you to fall asleep again,' persisted old Wheels. 'Bed's the proper place for you.'

'I should like,' murmured Jim, 'to go to bed—and sleep—for a month.'

Old Wheels laughed slightly at this.

'You wouldn't expect to wake up at the end of the time,' he said, continuing to shake Jim Podmore.

'I don't know—I don't care—I'd like to go to bed—and sleep—for a year. All right, Mr. Wheels—don't shake me—any more!—I'm awake—that is, as awake—as I shall be—till to-morrow morning. I beg you—a thousand pardons—for troubling you. I suppose—you found me asleep—somewhere. Where?'

'On the stairs.'

'Ah—yes. I thought—I should ha' fell down in the streets—as I walked along. I was so—dead-beat. I'm glad—you woke me up—for I wanted—to ask you something.'

Old Wheels thought it best not to interrupt the current of Jim's thoughts, and therefore did not speak. Jim shook himself much as a dog does when he comes out of the water, and having,

it is to be presumed, by that action, aroused his mental faculties, proceeded.

'We've had a talk—to-day—me and some mates—and I made up my mind—that I'd speak—to some one—as might know—better than us. I meant you.'

'Yes. What were you speaking about?'

'Well, you see—it come in this way. I never told you—about Dick Hart—did I?'

'No—not that I remember,' replied old Wheels.

'He was a mate of our'n—Dick Hart was. As good a fellow—as ever drawed—God's breath. He was working—on our line—a many months ago. He ain't working there now—not him—ain't working anywhere—can't get it. Willing enough—Dick Hart is—and a-breaking his heart—because he can't get it. He's a doomed man—Mr. Wheels—a doomed man!—and might as well—be dead—as alive. Better—a dooced sight better—if it warn't for his wife—and kids.'

Jim Podmore was evidently warming up. His theme was powerful enough to master his fatigue. Old Wheels listened attentively.

'It might have happened—to me—it *might* happen—to me—any night—when I'm dead-beat.

What then?' he asked excitedly, to the no small surprise of Snap, to whom this episode was so strange that he stood aside, gazing gravely at his master. 'What then?' Jim repeated. 'Why, I should be—what Dick Hart is—a-wandering about—in rags—a-starving almost. I should be worse than him—for when I think—of the old woman up-stairs—asleep—and my little Polly—that is my star—my star, Polly is!—and think of them—with nothing to eat—like Dick Hart's old woman and kids—I shouldn't be able—to keep my hands—to myself. And I shouldn't try to—I'm damned if I should!'

Old Wheels laid his hand with a soothing motion on the excited man's shoulder.

'Be cool, Mr. Podmore,' he said. 'Tell me calmly what you want. You are wandering from the subject.'

'No, I ain't,' responded Jim Podmore doggedly. 'I'm sticking to it. And it ain't likely—begging your pardon—for being so rough—that I *can* be calm—when I've got what I have got—in my mind.'

'What's that?'

Jim Podmore looked with apprehension at old Wheels, and then turned away his eyes uneasily.

'Never mind that—it's *my* trouble—and mustn't be spoken of. Let's talk of Dick Hart.'

'You were about,' said old Wheels gently, 'to tell me some story connected with him.'

'He was as good a fellow—as ever drew breath—and had been in the Company's service—ever so many years. There was nothing agin him. He did his work—and drew his screw. Little enough! He got overworked—often—as a good many of us gets—a-many times too often—once too often for poor Dick—as I'm going to tell you, short. It must ha' been—eight months ago—full—when Dick Hart—worked off his legs—with long hours—and little rest—had a accident. He took a oath—afterwards—that he was that dead-beat—before the accident—that he felt fit to drop down dead with fatigue. He couldn't keep—his eyes open—as I can't, sometimes—and when the accident—takes place—he goes almost mad. But that doesn't alter it. The accident's done—and Dick Hart's made accountable. He's took up—and tried—and gets six months. If what he did—had ha' been his fault—he ought to have been—hung—but they didn't seem—quite to know—whether he was to blame—or whether—he wasn't—so they give him six months—to make things even, I sup-

pose. While Dick's in prison—his wife's confined—with her second—and how they live—while he's away from 'em—God knows! Some of us gives a little—now and then. I give twice—but what Dick's wife got—in that way was—next to nothing—as much as we—could afford. Dick Hart—comes out of prison—a little while ago—and tries to get work—and can't. He gets a odd job—now and then—by telling lies about himself—and his old woman—gets a little charing—but they've not been able—to keep the wolf—from the door. It's got right in—and there they are—pretty-nigh starving—him and the old woman—and the kids.'

Jim Podmore's drowsiness coming upon him powerfully here, he had as much as he could do to keep himself awake. He indulged himself with a few drowsy nods, and then proceeded as though there had been no interval of silence.

'Well, we had a talk about him—to-day, me and my mates. We made up—a little money—not much—but as much—as we could afford—about six shillings—and sent it to his old woman. But we can't go on—doing this—and one of the men said—that if it come to the officers' ears—or the directors'—that we'd been making up money—for a man as has been discharged—and's been

in prison—and's cost the Company a lot o' money in damages—(for they had to pay two men—who was able—to afford a lawyer ; there was others—as was poor—who couldn't afford a lawyer, consequently—they got nothing)—that if it come—to the directors' ears—we should likely—get into trouble ourselves.'

Having come to the end of Dick Hart's story, Jim Podmore dozed off again, and would have fallen into deep sleep but for old Wheels nudging him briskly.

'Well?' asked the old man.

'Ah, yes,' said Jim ; 'I was almost forgetting. What I want to know is—is Dick Hart responsible—for what he's done ? Is it right—that a respectable man—a hardworking man—a honest man—should be compelled—to work until he's lost—all control over hisself—till he's ready to drop—as I've told you before—and as I've been ready to myself—and that then—when a accident happens—which wouldn't have happened—if he'd been fresh—or if a fresh man had been—in his place—is it right, I want to know,' and Jim Podmore raised his arm slowly and lowered it, and raised it again and lowered it again, as if it were a piston, 'that that man—should be put—in prison

—should be disgraced—should lose his honest name—shouldn't be able to get work—for his old woman—and the young uns—and that they should be almost starving—as Dick Hart's people's doing now ?'

Fortunately for old Wheels, who would have found these questions very difficult to answer, Jim Podmore was too tired and too sleepy to wait for a reply.

'If I don't go up-stairs—immediate,' he said, rising slowly to his feet, 'you'll have—to carry me. So I'll wish you—good-night, Mr. Wheels, and thank you.'

He paused at the door for the purpose of asking one other question.

'Did you ever feel—that something was going to happen—without knowing exactly what it was ?'

'Yes,' replied old Wheels good-humouredly, 'but it never did happen.'

'Ah,' pondered the puzzled man, 'but this will, though.'

'What will ?'

'Didn't I tell you—I didn't know what. But it'll happen—as sure as my name's—Jim Podmore. It's buzzing about my head now,—and I can't make it out.'

'Nervousness,' suggested old Wheels, 'brought on by overwork.'

'Mayhap, but there it is. What would you call it, now? Give it a name.'

'It is a presentiment, I should say.'

'That's it. I've got—a presentiment. Thank you. Good-night, Mr. Wheels. I've got—a presentiment—and it'll come true—as sure as my name's—Jim.'

With that Jim Podmore staggered up-stairs, with faithful Snap at his heels, and within an hour old Wheels heard the street-door bell ring, and hurried down-stairs.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOW FELIX GAINED A CLUE.

FELIX intended to leave Lily after he had seen her safely within doors, but the old man begged him to come in. A look from Lily decided him, and the three faithful souls ascended the stairs to the old man's room. Old Wheels entering first, gave Lily an opportunity to say hurriedly to Felix,

‘Don’t tell grandfather of my fainting, Felix. It might distress him.’

He promised her.

‘Nor of what passed between you and Mr. Sheldrake.’

‘Very well, Lily.’

She spoke in a whisper; she was so thrilling with exquisite sensitiveness that any harsher sound would have been a disturbance to her happy state.

‘I will think of what you have said to-night, Felix; you are right, I know—you *must* be right.’

(The unspoken words came to her: 'My heart tells me so.') 'Thank you for it, Felix, with all my heart.'

Their hands met in a tender clasp. They entered the room the next moment, and old Wheels looked towards them with a pleased expression in his face, brought there by the circumstance of Lily and Felix lingering for a few moments in the passage. It betokened a confidence between them.

It was one o'clock before Felix took his departure. The conversation between him and old Wheels had turned principally upon the mental disturbance of Mr. Podmore, and upon his presentiment. This made a great impression upon Felix, and, although he was almost ashamed to confess it to himself, took fast hold of his mind. He was predisposed for some such influence, from the thought of the crisis that seemed to be imminent in the life of the woman he loved. That it must come, and soon, he was convinced, and he thought to himself it would be almost a wise act to hasten it, if possible. He had quietly made it his business to acquaint himself with the nature of Mr. Sheldrake's transactions; and, notwithstanding that that gentleman was close and crafty,

Felix had learned much concerning him. The knowledge sprang naturally, as it were, out of Felix's profession. He was correspondent for two country newspapers, and had managed to insert the thin end of his wedge into the wall of London journalism. Steadily and unobtrusively he was working his way, and was sanguine and confident of the future. Very many people suppose that cunning is one of the principal specialties of wisdom, but it is not always so. A rare strength, which shows itself almost invariably in great and good results, lies in the man who is wise and not cunning—who is wise from honesty of purpose. Felix was this. He was sincere in all he did—honest in all he did. It is a pleasure to be able to indicate, even by such mere outlines as these, a character which too many persons do not believe in.

Beginning to earn his living by his pen, and being enabled to act in a certain measure independently, and to take his own view of things, it was natural that he should exercise his small power in the cause of right. It was not his ambition to be the Don Quixote of literature, but he could no more resist the inclination to strike hard blows at public shams and injustice than, being naturally truthful, he could resist the inclination

to tell the truth. Of course he could effect but little good. The great shield behind which imposture and knavery found shelter, and which protected dishonesty and hypocrisy, suffered but little from his attacks; but here and there he made a dent, and that was a great satisfaction to him. He was a faithful soldier, and fought with courage.

He knew that in some way Lily's brother was in Mr. Sheldrake's power, and accident revealed to him the nature of the bond between them. In his crusade against knavery, he became acquainted with the unmitigated roguery that was practised under the protection of the institution which, with a grim and ghastly humour, has been denominated the great national sport. His friend Charley, who introduced him to the columns of the *Penny Whistle*, was the first who opened his eyes to the knavery. It seems to be a recognised necessity that all young men who have the means and the leisure should go through the formula known as 'seeing life'—a process which to some is a sad tragedy, and which to nearly all is a bitter experience. Very few come out of that fire unscathed. Charley had gone through this formula—fortunately for him, in a superficial way. Charley's

parents were good people enough, and had tacitly agreed that their son must 'see life' before he settled; everybody's sons saw life before settling, and Charley must not be an exception. So the young fellow went into the world, and in the natural course of things became mixed up in matters, the mere mention of which would have brought a blush to his mother's cheek. But Charley was doing the proper thing: there was no doubt of that. However, the young fellow's inclinations were not inherently vicious, and he escaped the pitfalls in which so many weak and unfortunate ones are engulfed. He and Felix had met some few times since Felix's installation as London correspondent to the *Penny Whistle*, and they had opened their hearts to each other. Thus it came out that Charley told Felix of his introduction to the racing world, and of his adventures therein.

'You see, Felix,' he said, 'I had outrun my allowance, and I thought I might be able to set things straight, and pay my few small debts, without coming on my father's purse. So, led away by the flaming accounts in the newspapers, I went into betting; was introduced by a friend to a club where I could bet, and for three months went regularly to races. It didn't turn out well, and after

dropping nearly two hundred pounds, I went to my father, and made a clean breast of it. He paid my debts, and made me promise to give up the infatuation, as he called it. I promised willingly enough, for I had made up my mind before, and I am sure I shall never be drawn into the net again. The fact is, Felix, it didn't suit me: the men I met on the racecourses were such cads and blackguards that I soon became disgusted with myself for mixing with them. I tell you what it is, old fellow. I think being with you a great deal has done me good, and I have learnt from you to hate things that are mean. You've been to races, of course ?'

'I've been to Goodwood, and Ascot, and to the Derby. The Derby is a wonderful sight. I should like to go with you to one or two of the small meetings.'

They went in company, and Felix, having a deeper purpose in his mind than idle amusement, saw much to astonish him. As they were making their way through a crowd of sharks and gulls, Charley pulled his sleeve, and said,

'There! There's a man who had over a hundred pounds of my money.'

Turning, Felix saw Mr. David Sheldrake, evi-

dently very much at home. Felix, not wishing to be seen by Mr. Sheldrake, walked away, and watched him from a distance.

‘Is he a betting-man?’ asked Felix.

‘O, yes; and as sharp as a needle.’

‘Does he attend these meetings regularly?’

‘You seem to be interested in him, Felix.’

‘Yes, I know him.’

‘And don’t like him, evidently,’ observed Charley, judging from his friend’s tone.

‘That is true; I don’t like him. But you haven’t answered my question.’

‘I have met him on nearly every racecourse I have been to; he is always to be seen in the “ring,” I should say.’

Felix did not pursue the subject, but later in the day said,

‘Have you any documents, Charley, connected with your betting experiences, or have you destroyed them?’

‘I have them all. By the bye, they might be useful to you; there are some strange things among them—well, perhaps not strange in themselves, but strange that such things should be allowed. It would be a good subject for you to take up.’

'Any letters from that man?'

'O, yes; suppose I send you the packet?'

'I should like to see them.'

They were received in due course by Felix, and they so interested him that he began from that time to subscribe to the sporting papers, and to make a regular study of the usually unprofitable theme. Any person who did not know Felix's character might reasonably have supposed that he had been bitten by the mania, and that he was beginning to entertain the idea that he might make a fortune by betting with sharps. They would have had ample grounds for so supposing, if they had known that Felix actually sent small sums in stamps to the prophets and tipsters and the layers of odds who advertised in the sporting papers, for the purpose of obtaining the information necessary for the rapid and certain realisation of 'fabulous sums'—a phrase which many of the advertisers used in the traps they set, unconscious of the ironical truth it contained. But what Felix was doing was a means to another end, and he lost his money cheerfully. He began to frequent race-courses also, and on one occasion, early in his experience, he saw Lily's brother, as he expected to see him, running hither and thither in a state of

blind excitement. With a set determination, Felix watched the young man during the whole of the day; saw the fatal infatuation which urged him onwards; and saw him pass through the various stages of hope, suspense, and agony. Felix saw more with the eyes of his mind; he saw ruin waiting at Alfred's heels. Felix had met with an old legend which stated how every human being was attended by two angels, one bad, one good, and how they strove for mastery over the soul they attended. As the recollection of this legend came to him, Felix looked up and saw Alfred's bad angel, Mr. David Sheldrake, talking to Alfred, and Alfred eagerly listening. It saddened Felix to see this, although he fully expected it, and was prepared for it. 'Alfred's good angel,' he thought, 'is love. But love has no sword to strike this false friend dead.' But Felix went home that evening with a clue in his hand.

On this night, as Felix walked away from Lily's house, he thought of these things, and was too disturbed to go home. He walked about the quiet streets, and at the end of an hour found himself on the Thames Embankment. As he stood there, musing, gazing into the solemn river, he became conscious of a sudden tremor in the

air. He looked around with a feeling of vague alarm upon him ; but he saw nothing, heard nothing. 'Psha!' he muttered. 'Mr. Podmore's presentiment is frightening me with shadows. I'll stroll past Lily's house, and then go home to bed.'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

JIM PODMORE HAS A DREAM, AND WAKES UP IN TIME.

JIM PODMORE, staggering into the one room which formed his Englishman's castle, found his wife and Pollypod fast asleep in bed. Before he went out to his work in the morning, he had told his wife not to sit up for him that night. 'You've had precious hard work of it, old woman,' he had said, 'this last week ; so go to bed early and have a long night's rest. I'll find my way up-stairs all right.' The precious hard work which Jim Podmore referred to was one of those tasks which poor people—especially women—take upon themselves when occasion requires, with a readiness and cheerfulness which it is beautiful to see. A neighbour's child had been ill, and required constant watching. The mother, worn out with her labour of love, had fallen ill herself, and Mrs. Podmore flew to her aid, and attended to her household

duties, and nursed her and the child through their sickness. The cheerfulness with which Mrs. Podmore undertook this task and performed it, as if it were a duty incumbent upon her, cannot be described. The best reward she could receive was hers: the mother and child recovered their health, and were strong enough to attend to themselves. Late in the previous night the doctor had released Mrs. Podmore, and had told her—with smiles and good words and with a hand-shake which gratified the simple woman mightily—that now she had best go home and take care of herself; ‘for we can get about ourselves now,’ he said, ‘and sha’n’t want you any more.’ This accounted for Jim Podmore having to find his way up-stairs by himself, for Mrs. Podmore seldom went to bed before he returned home. He knew, on this night, that his wife was asleep, and in the midst of his drowsiness he took off his boots in the passage, so that he should not disturb her.

Entering the room in his stockinged feet, he stepped softly to the bedside, and rested his hand lightly and tenderly on Pollypod’s neck. The bed being against the wall, and Pollypod sleeping inside, he could not kiss her without disturbing his wife. The child slept peacefully, and Jim Pod-

more gazed lovingly at the pretty picture, and leaned forward to feel the sweet breath, pure as an angel's whisper, that came from her parted lips. His supper was laid for him on the table, and he sat down to it, Snap standing at his feet in patient eagerness waiting for such scraps and morsels as he thought fit to give. Jim did not forget his dog; Snap fared well, and when supper was finished the dog stretched himself on the ground, and with half-closed eyes watched his master's face. Snap blinked and blinked, but although occasionally his eyes were so nearly closed that only the thinnest line of light could be seen, the dog never relaxed his watchful gaze. Jim sat in his chair, pipe in mouth, and smoked and dozed, and thought of Dick Hart and his wife and children, and of his own wife and Pollypod, till they all became mixed up together in the strangest way, and in the phantasmagoria of his fancy changed places and merged one into the other in utter defiance of all probability. Thus, as he leaned forward to catch the sweet breath that came from Pollypod's lips, the child's face became blurred and indistinct, and in her place Dick Hart appeared, crouching upon the railway platform in an agony of despair. The platform

itself appeared, with its throng of anxious faces, with its sound of hurried feet and cries of pain, with a light in the air that belonged to neither night nor day, sensitive with a tremor which was felt, but could not be seen or described, and which spoke of hopes for ever crushed out, and of lives of fair promise blighted by the act that lay in one fatal moment's neglect or helplessness. 'If I don't go to bed,' murmured Jim, with a start, whereat all these things vanished into nothingness, 'I shall fall asleep.' And still he sat, and murmured, 'Poor Dick!'

It was really but the work of a moment. Jim Podmore being on duty, suddenly felt a shock—then heard a crash, followed by screams and shouts, and what seemed to be the muffled sound of a myriad voices. He knew that an accident had occurred, and he ran forward, and saw carriages overturned on the line, and huge splinters of wood lying about. 'Who did it?' he cried. 'Dick Hart!' a voice replied; and then he heard Dick's voice crying, 'O, my God!' The busy hands were at work clearing the wreck, and the few passengers—happily there were but few—were assisted out. Most of them had escaped with a

bruise or a scratch, but one man, they said, looked in a bad state, and at his own entreaty they allowed him to lie still on the platform until doctors, who had been promptly sent for, had arrived; and one little child was taken into a room, and lay like dead. Jim Podmore was in the room, and he saw Dick Hart brought in between two men. Dick, when his eyes lighted on the piteous sight of the little girl lying like that, trembled as if ague had seized him, and began to sob and cry. '*I did it! I did it!*' he gasped. 'Why don't some one strike me down dead!' As he uttered these words, and as he stood there, with a face whiter than the face of the child who lay before him, a woman rushed in and cried in a wild tone, 'Where's the man that killed my child?' Upon this, with a cry wilder than that to which the poor woman had given vent, Dick Hart wrested himself free from the men, whose hands (in their grief at what had occurred) were only lightly laid upon him, and rushed out of the room like a madman. The men followed him, but he was too quick for them, and before they could lay hands on him again, he had jumped from the platform on to the line, dashing aside the persons who tried to stop him. His mad idea was to run forward on the line until he

saw a train coming, and then to throw himself before it and be crushed to pieces. But he was saved from the execution of this piteous design ; the men reached him and seized him, and carried him back by main force. When he was in the room again, his passion being spent, he fell upon his knees, and looked round with a scared white face, waiting for what was to come. 'Poor Dick!' murmured Jim Podmore. And then the men whispered to each other how that Dick Hart had been worked off his legs lately ; how the accident was nothing more than was to be expected ; and how Dick's wife was near her confinement with her second. 'Poor Dick!' murmured Jim Podmore again, for the thought of Dick Hart's one little girl at home, and the other child that was soon expected, brought Pollypod to his mind.

It was quite true ; Dick Hart's wife was very near her confinement, and on this very night, unconscious of the dreadful event that had taken place, she was busy getting together the little things she had made for her first-born, and recalling the feelings she had experienced before she became a mother—feelings in which joy and fear were so commingled as to be inseparable. The time was night, in the wane of summer, and

many a smile came upon the woman's lips, and many a tender thought dwelt in her mind, as she laid out the little garments and examined them to see where they wanted a stitch. Mrs. Hart had been married five years; and while she was employed in the manner just described, her first child, four years of age, was sitting in a low chair, playing with a doll, which not only had softening of the brain, but softening of every portion of its anatomy—for it was a rag doll.

But the doll, treasure as it was, notwithstanding its flat face (for rags do not admit of the formation of features of particular shape and beauty), was not the only object of the child's attention. She had that day been invested with a pair of new red socks, and Little Vanity was now holding out her little leg as straight as she could, and calling her mother's attention for the hundredth time to her flaming red treasures. Mrs. Hart knelt before the child, and admired the socks with the most outrageously-exaggerated turns of speech, and pulled them up tight, to her child's infinite delight and contentment. Then the mother began to prattle upon the subject nearest to her heart, and began to speak also, for the hundredth time, about the little brother—for Mrs. Hart had

settled that 'her second,' as Jim Podmore had expressed it, was to be a boy—whom Rosy presently would have to play with.

'And you'll love him very much, Rosy, won't you?' asked the mother.

'Yes, very, very much.'

Indeed, Rosy used a great many more 'verys' than two, and quite ingenuously, be it stated. But Rosy had a strong desire to be enlightened upon a certain point, and she seized the present favourable opportunity. She had heard a great deal about this little brother whom she was to love and play with, but she was puzzled to know where the little stranger was to come from. Now was the time to obtain the information.

'Mother,' asked the inquisitive little girl, 'when will Bunny come?'

'Bunny,' it must be explained, was the fanciful title by which Rosy had already christened the expected stranger.

'Next week, Rosy,' answered the happy mother; 'almost sure next week. Ain't you glad?'

'Yes, I'm very, very glad.' (Again a redundancy of 'verys' which must be left to the imagination.) 'But, mother, who'll bring Bunny here?'

'Who'll bring him, Rosy? Why, the doctor, to be sure.'

Rosy nodded her head wisely, and employed a full minute in the silent enjoyment of her new red socks. Mrs. Hart was silent also, worshipping her little girl. If children only knew how their mothers worship them! Down went Rosy's leg again.

'Where will the doctor bring Bunny from, mother?'

'From the parsley-bed,' replied the mother, laughing.

'Is Bunny there now, mother?'

'Yes, dear.'

'Did I come out of a parsley-bed, mother?'

'Yes, my dear,' and Mrs. Hart smothered Rosy's face and neck with kisses. She was so occupied with her happiness that she did not hear the door, and did not know that any one was in the room until she heard a voice calling her name. The voice belonged to a neighbour, Mrs. Thomson, and Mrs. Hart rose to her feet, and was beginning to tell merrily of the conversation which she had just had with Rosy, when something in Mrs. Thomson's face stopped her tongue.

'What's the matter, Mrs. Thomson? What is it? Tell me, quick!'

'Now, bear up, Mrs. Hart,' said the neighbour; 'remember how near your time is, and bear up, there's a good soul!'

'What's the matter?' cried Mrs. Hart, thoroughly frightened. 'Tell me, quick, for God's sake! Is it anything about Dick? Has he had an accident? Is he hurt? O, why don't you speak!'

'Dick's not hurt.'

'Thank God! But on and off, all this week, I've been frightened about him. It's a shame and a sin to work a man as he's been worked. Who's outside?'

She flew to the door, and pulled into the room a man employed by the same Company as her husband.

'There's something the matter,' she gasped, and caught Rosy up, and pressed the child close to her breast. The man judged wisely that it would be best to come to the point at once.

'Dick sent me to you, Mrs. Hart,' he said; 'he's had an accident, and one or two people have been hurt; he's all right himself, and he sent me to tell you so.'

'Why didn't he come himself?' asked the wife, trembling and crying.

‘Well, you see——’ began the man ; but Mrs. Hart did not allow him to proceed.

‘They’ve put him in prison,’ she said, with a quick short breath ; ‘my Dick, the best husband and the best father in the world ! And they’re going to punish him for what’s not his fault ! Do you know how many hours’ sleep he’s had this week ?’

‘Don’t excite yourself, there’s a good soul !’ remonstrated Mrs. Thomson. ‘He’ll come out of it all right. Think of your baby.’

‘He’s not in prison, Mrs. Hart,’ said the man ; ‘but he’s going to remain at the station until after the inquiry.’

‘Mrs. Thomson, will you take care of Rosy till I come back ?’

‘Why, surely, my dear, you’re not going out in your condition !’

‘I’m going to my husband,’ said Mrs. Hart, ‘and I’m going to see them managers and directors, and ask them what they’re going to do to Dick.’

With that, the distracted woman, putting on her hat and shawl, left Rosy in her neighbour’s charge, and hurried down-stairs, followed by the man, who said it was best to let her have her

way, and that it was what he would like his wife to do if anything happened to him.

Jim Podmore was with her during all this time, and witnessed the interview between husband and wife.

'I can't tell how it occurred,' said Dick Hart, who, although dreadfully distressed, was now more calm, and inexpressibly comforted by the presence of his wife. 'Everything seemed to take place in a flash of light, like. I suppose it was because I was tired out with too much work. I don't care for myself. I'm thinking of the future, and what's going to become of you and Rosy—and—and the baby.'

Dick broke down a dozen times during the interview, and sobbed and cried like a child.

'It'll always be on my mind. I'm glad I didn't kill myself, for your sake. Perhaps it'd ha' been better for you if I'd been killed, though. I don't know; I don't know what to think. You'd better take what money I've got about me. It ain't much; but I daresay they'll pay you for my work up to to-night.'

Dick was fairly bewildered in this serious crisis, and completely helpless. If he had had money, he might have sent for a lawyer; but between eleven and twelve shillings was all his wealth.

An inquiry and inquest were held, at both of which Jim Podmore was present. Indeed, he was never absent from Dick Hart and his wife during all this time, although he took no active part in the history of their lives. And this is what he saw.

Dick Hart on his trial for manslaughter, with an array of lawyers against him sufficient to frighten a poor man out of his senses. The lawyers for the prosecution were against him, and strove, by all the ingenuity of long study and sharp experience, to prove him the guiltiest man that ever stood in a felon's dock. The lawyers of the Company were against him, and their aim was to prove the perfect innocence of the powerful directors they represented, and therefore the utter and inexcusable guilt of Dick Hart. Strong odds these against a poor man with an empty purse. A strange road to justice was this on which Dick Hart found himself, unarmed and with bare breast—and with something of a guilty conscience also, for he really did not know how far he was to blame—opposed to the keen intellects of those who were grandly paid to find him guilty. He quivered with helpless rage, he was racked with despair, as he listened to the manner

in which the case was stated by his enemies : they were nothing less, they were there to destroy him. But there was a grain of salt for him in the midst of all this great trouble. A young lawyer, not overburdened with briefs, undertook his defence for the love of the thing, and pleaded so ably that he very nearly succeeded in proving Dick Hart innocent — as undoubtedly he was. Unfortunately, he could not prove that Dick Hart was not immediately responsible for the accident ; but he did prove that the man, by excessive overwork, was so prostrate from fatigue, that it would have been almost next to a miracle had an accident not occurred. 'Perhaps,' said this daring champion, to the admiration of Jim Podmore, who nodded his head in confirmation and approbation at every thrust the lawyer made—'perhaps you will say that the prisoner was wrong in allowing himself to be so overtasked ; but he has a wife and child dependent on him for support, and his wife is now at home, expecting every hour to saddle him with another responsibility. The prisoner is a hardworking man, and a poor man, and had he refused to perform the duties required of him, never mind at what sacrifice to himself, never mind at what peril to the public—

as has been too often unhappily proved in other cases—he would have stood a fair chance of being dismissed from the service of the Company. If this case serves in any way to direct public attention to the manner in which too many servants of the railway companies are overworked, it will be fortunate that it is tried; but the prisoner must not be made the victim of a bad and abominable system. Not many days ago, the coroner of Middlesex, at an inquest held upon the body of an engine-fitter who was crushed to death between two engines, stated that no fewer than thirty railway servants are killed in his district every year; and he very pertinently wished to know whether such wholesale slaughter was altogether necessary. This is not the question for you to answer now, but it may lead you to a merciful view of the prisoner's case; for the perils of the service are sufficiently great in themselves, and should not be made greater by unfairly tasking the powers of the men. There are in the full week of seven days one hundred and sixty-eight hours; and there are hundreds of railway servants who can show a time-bill of one hundred and twelve hours. Add to these hours the time employed in going to and coming from work, and you will have

some idea of the manner in which these men are overworked. I read lately in a leading article upon this subject in a paper whose facts may be relied upon, that some men have worked thirty, some forty hours right off, without any sleep but that which nature has exacted at the post of duty, at the peril of those intrusted to their charge. It is the public who suffer; and when an accident occurs in consequence of a man being unfairly worked, he—being a man, and not a machine—cannot in justice be held responsible. At a meeting lately held in Brighton, one railway servant stated that he sometimes worked thirty-seven hours at a stretch.' The lawyer cited many such facts as these, and even had the hardihood to assert that a director or a manager should be standing in the dock in Dick Hart's place. However, it seemed to be understood that it was impossible to let Dick Hart off scot-free, and being found guilty and strongly recommended to mercy, he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment. A sentence which was virtually a parody upon justice: for if Dick Hart were guilty, he should have been hanged; and if he were innocent, he should have been compensated for the torture he had been made to suffer. An hour after the trial

Jim Podmore was telling Dick Hart that his wife was confined.

It was a mystery to Jim how Dick's wife and children managed to live during that time, but manage they did, somehow. Neighbours were as kind to them as their own narrow means would allow: Rosy had many a good meal in one house and another; when Mrs. Hart grew strong, she went out charing; sometimes when she could not get work she begged—and dodged the policeman. It is amazing to what shifts some honest unfortunate folk are compelled to resort in the necessity that nature lays upon them to eat or die: which last is not an easy thing to do. Dick came out of prison and tried to get work, and failed. He was compelled also to resort to such dishonest shifts as adopting a name that did not belong to him, as denying this and that unworthy thing, as putting a cheerful face upon an empty stomach. He obtained work on another line of railway, and was turned away at the end of the fourth day, having been *found out*, a crime which is invariably severely punished, and which the world never forgives. Dick Hart really found existence a very difficult thing; and yet he had muscles, and was willing to exercise them.

The struggle was too hard for him, and he fell sick, and could not go out of his room for weeks. His wife nursed him and worked for him, after a fashion. When she could not get charing to do, she went a-begging. Rosy was sent to a school where the children occasionally enjoyed the blessing of penny dinners. On those occasions Rosy was always duly armed with a penny by her mother. One day a policeman arrested Mrs. Hart for begging, and she was brought before the magistrate. Money was found upon her—one shilling and sevenpence—and eight boxes of fuses. The policeman, in his evidence, fairly stated that he had made inquiry at the address Mrs. Hart gave, and found that she lived in a respectable house, that Dick Hart was sick and unable to move out of his room, that he had never been known to be drunk, and that neighbours sincerely pitied him and spoke well of him; also that the mistress of the school to which Rosy went gave the child and her mother an excellent character. Asked what she had to say for herself, Mrs. Hart told the truth: she went out to get bread for her husband and children; she asserted that she was compelled to beg. The magistrate said she should have gone to the parish. Then

she told a piteous story. She *had* gone to the parish, and the relieving-officer (a mock title, surely!) refused to give her any out-door relief, but said she and her family might go into the workhouse, if she chose. She declined to do this, as in that case her husband would not be able to get work, and she did not wish to be a burden to the parish. She begged for a loaf of dry bread for her children; and 'dressed in his little brief authority,' the relieving officer refused. 'We have not broken our fast,' she pleaded; and asked what they were to do. 'The best you can,' was the merciful reply. She did the best she could: she went into the streets hungry, and begged; and hurried home with the first penny she received, and sent Rosy to school, armed for dinner. Then she continued her begging—with her next proceeds bought a dozen boxes of fusees—and when she was in a flourishing condition, with one shilling and sevenpence in her pocket, was arrested for her monstrous crime.

It is pleasant to be able to record that the poor woman was acquitted, and that the magistrate spoke in proper terms of the conduct of the relieving-officer. It gave Jim Podmore pleasure, but this feeling soon gave place to pain as he wit-

nessed the downward course of Dick Hart and his family, and the misery they endured. He was with them in their poorly-furnished home, and was gazing sadly at their white pinched faces, when suddenly Rosy's face changed to that of Pollypod his own darling; in the place of Mrs. Hart he saw his own wife; and he himself stood where Dick Hart had stood a moment before. These figures, himself and his wife and child, vanished as suddenly and as strangely as they had appeared, and he found himself on the platform on which his duties were performed. A bewildering sound was in his ears. A thousand engines were screaming furiously, a thousand voices were shouting despairingly, a thousand terrible fears were making themselves heard. The air was filled with clamour and confusion, and starting forward with a wildly-beating heart, he awoke.

He had been dreaming. But there was cause for these his later fancies. The faithful dog Snap was tearing at the door, through the crevices of which Jim saw smoke stealing. He looked towards the bed: Polly and her mother were fast asleep. He ran to the door, and opened it, and a blaze of flame rushed on to him, and almost blinded him. The house was on fire!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FELIX BECOMES A LANDLORD.

JIM PODMORE'S first feeling after the shock of the discovery was one of deep-felt gratitude, and a muttered 'Thank the Lord!' escaped his lips as he saw his wife and child lying asleep in bed. When he started to his feet in a half-conscious state, with the clamour and the roar in his ears, his fear was that there had been an accident on the line, and that Polly and her mother had been hurt; and he was inexpressibly relieved to find that he had been dreaming. So deep and strong was his feeling of relief that he did not immediately realise the real danger which threatened him and those dear to him. It came upon him presently in its full force, and he recognised that a moment's delay might prove fatal. The first thing to find out was the extent of the danger. He had shut the door directly the fire met his gaze. Now he opened it, and ran down a few

steps, on which the fire had not yet seized. He was beaten back by the flames. He fancied he heard cries from the lower part of the house, but he could see nothing for the smoke. There was no escape that way. Snap ran hither and thither in the wildest agitation, barking at the flames to keep them down. As Jim Podmore threw open the window in despair, to see what means of escape that outlet afforded, he saw the forms of persons hurrying to the street, and heard the cries they uttered; but he could not distinguish a face. Neither could they below distinguish his face, for he had closed the door again, and impelled by some strange process of reasoning, had locked it to keep out the flames. They saw, however, that some one was standing at the window, and they called out to him, but he was too agitated to understand what they said. The front of the house presented a flat surface of brick, and there seemed to be nothing between him and death—not a foothold, nor anything to cling to. The whole of this action had taken place in scarcely more than two or three moments, and within that time Snap had leaped upon the bed, and had aroused Pollypod and her mother. Had they been alone, it is probable that they would

have slept on unconscious of their danger, for the smoke, stealing through the crevices of the door, had already somewhat stupefied them, and whatever subtle influence that and the dull roar of voices without might have had upon their dreams, they would not have aroused them to consciousness. Mrs. Podmore, with a scream, jumped out of bed, and looked wildly around; at the same moment she snatched Polly from the bed, and held the child close, to shield her from danger.

‘Keep cool, old woman,’ said Jim Podmore; ‘the house is on fire;’ and muttered inly, ‘I knew that presentiment would come true—didn’t I tell old Wheels so?’

Mrs. Podmore was now standing at the window by Jim’s side, with Polly in her arms. Their white nightdresses shone in the midst of the dark surface of brick, and voices reached them, rashly advising them to jump down. But they were on the third-floor, and although Jim saw friendly arms held out below, he held his wife tight, lest in her fear she should obey the entreaties of their neighbours.

‘There’s time enough for that, old woman,’ he

muttered, with thick breath ; ' perhaps the fire-escape 'll come. It'd be almost certain death to take the leap.'

Time was too precious to waste in mere words, and he released her from his embrace. She turned to the door, but he cried out to her not to open it, and that their only chance lay in doing their best to keep out the flames.

' There's only one way out for us, old woman ; and that's by the window. Put Polly down, and give me a hand here. Quick ! Don't be frightened, my darling !'

He was tying the bedclothes together, to form a rope by which they might escape through the window, and Mrs. Podmore flew to help him. The door began to crack, and the room to fill with smoke ; little jets of flame appeared.

' God help us !' cried Mrs. Podmore. ' We shall be burnt to death !'

Jim said nothing to this, but all the bedclothes being used, he hurriedly fixed the mattress against the door, to gain another moment ; then tied one end of the rope firmly to the foot of the bedstead, and threw the other end out of the window. It reached a little below the second-floor window. As he leaned forward to see how long it was, a ladder

was fixed against the wall of the house, and a man, cheered on by the crowd, ran up to the room where old Wheels slept.

‘There’s the old man getting out,’ said Jim, in a suppressed tone; the father, mother, and child were now together at the window; ‘and the man’s jumped into the room. Don’t look behind you, mother! Thank God, there’s the fire-engine!’

It came tearing up the narrow street, and brave men were at work almost in an instant.

‘The man’s out on the ladder, mother, with Lily in his arms. Hurrah!’ Jim lost sight of his own danger for a moment. ‘It’ll be our turn presently. The Gribbles are getting down now. They’ve found a rope.’

Indeed, in less time than it takes to describe, all these, happily, were safely rescued, and only Jim Podmore and his wife and child remained in the burning house. The flames were in the room, and the fire-escape had not arrived. A moment’s delay now would be fatal.

‘Do you think you could hold fast to the rope,’ asked Jim of his wife, with a tightening grasp on the knots, ‘and slide down? There’s no other chance left.’

'I don't know, Jim,' replied the trembling woman.

'See—there are two men climbing the ladder to catch us, and there are others below them, holding them up. You'll have to drop into their arms when you get to the end. Quick, mother! Now!'

'I can't, Jim,' gasped the fainting woman; 'I can't. Never mind me. Save Polly!'

Without another word, Jim Podmore, with Polly in his arms, swung out upon the rope. Happily it held, and bore the strain. Those below watched him with agonised looks, and the roar suddenly became hushed.

'Drop the child!' cried a voice. It came from one of the men on the ladder, and sounded clear and distinct, as from a silver trumpet. 'Don't be frightened, Pollypod! It's me—Felix!'

'Felix! Felix!' screamed Pollypod, and as she cried, fell through the air into his arms. The cheers and the roar of delight that came from the crowd were frozen as it were in the throats of the excited throng as Jim, assuring himself by a hasty glance that his child was safe, began to ascend the rope for his wife. He was not a moment too soon.

She was so overpowered with fright that he had to drag her through the window.

‘Keep your senses about you,’ he cried, ‘for God’s sake, old woman! Polly’s safe! Hold me tight—don’t loose your hold! For Polly’s sake, now—for Polly’s sake, mother!’

She clung to him so tightly as almost to press the breath out of his body; it was fortunate for them that another ladder was raised, and that other friendly arms were held out to break their fall. The moment they were safe, the attention of the crowd was diverted to the form of a dog, who was standing and barking on the window-sill above. It was Snap, who had been left behind. The dog was in great distress, for the flames were darting towards him, and he could scarcely keep his foothold. But Jim Podmore saw the peril of his faithful servant, and having hurriedly ascertained that his wife and Pollypod were unhurt, he ran up the ladder and called out to Snap to jump. The dog had but one alternative—to be burnt; so he risked his limbs, and jumped clean on to the shoulders of his master, whence he rolled safely into the crowd, who cheered merrily at the episode. Soon all the rescued ones were assembled in a house at the bottom of the street. Their

neighbours had lent them clothes, and they stood looking strangely at one another, grateful for their escape, but dismayed at the prospect before them. Presently their tongues were loosened, and every little incident connected with the fire was narrated with eagerness. No one knew or suspected how it had occurred. Alfred had come home, and, in accordance with the promise he had given to Lizzie to kiss Lily before he went to bed, had knocked at his sister's door and found that she was awake. He sat talking to her for about a quarter of an hour, and then went to bed.

'I was asleep in a minute,' said Alfred, 'and I don't remember anything until I was pulled out of bed and told the house was on fire.'

He held out his hand to Felix, for it was Felix who, after helping to rescue Lily and old Wheels, had aroused Alfred to a sense of his danger. Felix responded cordially, and was sufficient of a casuist to be quietly pleased because a lucky chance had given him a claim upon Alfred's gratitude.

Voices asked where the fire had commenced.

'It must have broken out in the lower part of the house,' said old Wheels; 'but it does not matter to us now. Thank God we're all saved, eh, Pollypod?'

Pollypod nodded her head a dozen times, and looked solemnly at Felix.

‘*You saved me,*’ she said.

‘Father saved you, Polly,’ replied Felix. ‘Didn’t he make a rope and creep out of the window down it with Polly in his arms?’

‘But you caught me!’

‘Yes, I caught you, little one. It’s like the story of Cock Robin, with a happier ending. Some one saw the fire—some one cried it out—some one climbed up—some one crept down—some one caught Polly.’

Which made Polly laugh. But her father looked grave. His strait was a hard one indeed. Every stick of furniture burnt, every scrap of spare clothing burnt, no money in his purse, and not insured for a shilling. Here was a fine example for theorists whose favourite theme is the improvidence of the poor!

The Gribbles were better off than the others, and had taken shelter elsewhere. Gribble junior had saved his little store of money, and had thrown his clothes and those of his wife out of the window, not having had time to put them on. Gribble senior drivelled a great deal; and weakly

declared his belief that coöperation was the cause of this, his crowning misfortune.

Jim Podmore did not say anything of his dream. His wife made a remark.

‘It’s an ill-wind that blows nobody good, Jim. If you hadn’t fell asleep in the chair, you wouldn’t have saved your clothes, perhaps.’

‘A nice figure I should ha’ looked going to work without ’em,’ he replied, with grim humour.

If there was any comfort in the fact that they were all in the same boat as regards the complete destruction of their worldly goods, that comfort was theirs. The only one who seemed to make light of the misfortune was Felix; he extracted some secret satisfaction from it. He had a plan in his head.

He certainly lost no time in putting it into execution. In the afternoon of the following day he burst in upon them. He was flushed and triumphant.

‘Now, then,’ he said, with heartless gaiety, ‘if you had anything to pack up, I should tell you to pack up at once and get ready. As it is, you can come along with me at once. I intend to take you all into custody.’

They looked at him for his meaning.

‘Polly,’ he said, ‘will you come and live in my house?’

‘O, yes, yes!’

‘I’ve settled it all with your husband, Mrs. Podmore, and he comes straight from his work to my house to-night; so you are powerless, you see, and dare not make an objection.’

Old Wheels drew Felix aside.

‘Explain this to me, Felix.’

‘Well, I knew of a house—a small one—ready furnished, which I could obtain on reasonable terms for a short time. I have taken it as a speculation, and I am going to instal you at once in your new home.’

‘How as a speculation, Felix?’

‘Why, you shall pay me rent, of course, when you have turned yourself round, and so shall Mr. Podmore. The loss would be a very trifling one to me—I am doing fairly well now, you know—if you all cheated me out of the rent. Seriously, sir, I know you would as soon be under an obligation to me as to any other man, and a home you must have. I am delighted to have you all in my power.’

He beckoned to Lily.

‘Where do you think your new home is, Lily?’

'I can't guess.'

Strange enough, she also seemed to extract happiness from their trouble.

'Where would you like it to be? Near to Lizzie's?'

She uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

'Well, it is; within twenty yards of Lizzie's house. Lizzie is making everything ready for you now. Mrs. Podmore has a room up-stairs. A cab is waiting at the door, and we are all going together in a bunch.'

Old Wheels rang Felix's hand; Lily smiled one of her brightest smiles; Pollypod jumped for joy; Mrs. Podmore burst out crying, and throwing her arms round Felix's neck, kissed him first and begged his pardon afterwards.

That evening they were all comfortably installed in their new residence. Even Alfred was delighted, although he knew that a sword was hanging over his head.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ALFRED'S LAST CHANCE.

It happened that on the day succeeding the fire Mr. David Sheldrake purposely kept away from Soho. He was nettled at the treatment he had received the previous evening, both from Lily and Lizzie, and he was determined to show them that he was not to be trifled with. He knew that Alfred would be uneasy at not seeing him, for a great race—the City and Suburban—was to be run at Epsom the following week, and Alfred's hopes hung upon the result. Alfred had begged for another advance of money, and Mr. Sheldrake had promised to give it to him, knowing that it would be returned to him through Con Staveley. 'He will be mad at not seeing me,' thought Mr. Sheldrake, 'and he will set it down to the manner in which the girls behaved to me last night. They will be sure to hear of it from him, and it

will do them good. At any rate, it will show them that it is a dangerous game to play fast-and-loose with me.' Mr. Sheldrake's vanity was wounded; he had never taken so much pains with a girl as he had taken with Lily, and here he was, after many months' attention and wooing, in the same position as when he started. Time had been wasted, and money had been thrown away; not much of the latter certainly—but the result altogether was unsatisfactory. He would bring the matter to a climax; he would close on Alfred, and send old Musgrave and Lizzie to the right-about. He had them all in his power, and fear might accomplish what fair words failed to do.

He did not hear of the fire until late in the following night. He hastened to the spot, and found the house in ruins. It was quite midnight before he ascertained where Lily had found refuge, and when he learnt that they had gone to live in a house very near to that occupied by Mr. Musgrave, he smiled complacently. 'I could not have hoped for anything better,' he thought. Before noon the next day he was at the house, overwhelming them with expressions of sympathy and with offers of assistance, all of which were gently declined by old Wheels.

'We want for nothing, thank you,' he said smilingly.

'But,' urged Mr. Sheldrake somewhat coarsely, 'I am told you were burnt right out, and hadn't time to save a stick.'

'You were told right; we did not save a stick.'

'Then you want a friend,' persisted Mr. Sheldrake.

'We did,' said old Wheels, 'and one came—the best of friends.'

Burning to know who this best of friends was, Mr. Sheldrake put the question direct, which old Wheels parried by saying,

'I don't think he would like us to speak of it, and I shall please him, I believe, by not mentioning his name.'

There were in the room only the old man and Lily and Pollypod, and not one of these enlightened Mr. Sheldrake. When the old man spoke of this best of friends, Pollypod chimed in with enthusiastic declarations, and said, in her child-like way, that he was so good, so good!

'He seems to be a favourite with all of you,' observed Mr. Sheldrake.

'He is a wizard,' said Pollypod from her corner; 'a good wizard. Father says he's a

trump, and mother loves him. So do I, dearly, dearly. So does Mr. Wheels. So does Lily—don't you, Lily?"

Mr. Sheldrake turned suddenly and sharply upon Lily. A deep rose-tint had stolen into her face, and, for contrast, a dark cloud overshadowed Mr. Sheldrake's. Not a motion, not a look, escaped old Wheels, who said,

'Yes, we cannot help having an affection for one who has been so kind to us.'

'Of course not, of course not,' assented Mr. Sheldrake, concealing his displeasure, 'and I consider myself particularly unfortunate in having been deprived of the opportunity of standing in his place. Then I might have had the same claim upon your affection. It is the more unfortunate because I am so often in the habit of strolling about Soho during the small hours. Many a time have I walked up and down your street for an hour at least after midnight. Now what hard fortune was it that prevented me doing so on this occasion?' He intended these words to convey a significant declaration of his tender regard for Lily, and he added, in a low tone, addressed especially to her: 'I went home not very happy because I thought you were angry

with me for what occurred at the theatre. I hope you are not displeased with me now. Indeed, I was not to blame.'

And again Mr. Sheldrake pressed offers of assistance upon old Wheels, which again were firmly declined. The man of the world departed in no pleasant humour. His jealousy was aroused. Who was this friend, of whom the child had said that she loved him dearly, dearly, and that Lily loved him also? He had half a suspicion, and he was determined to know. Then his thoughts reverted to Lily's behaviour to himself. 'Does she suspect,' he mused, in his own elegant vernacular, 'that I'm not acting on the square, and is she holding off on purpose to draw me on? In one word, David Sheldrake, is the girl a model of simplicity—or artfulness? Any way, she is a witch, and has set me on fire. I *will* have her! I could almost make up my mind to marry her.' A serious consideration for such a man as he, who looked upon girls merely as the playthings of an hour, and in whose mind womanly virtue and goodness were like dead wood in a forest. That, in case he made up his mind to such a contingency, there would be a doubt of success, was too manifestly ridiculous to be entertained for a moment.

As he mused, he saw Alfred coming towards him. The young man did not see Mr. Sheldrake at first, and that gentleman stepped aside to observe Alfred's manner, in which he seemed to detect something more marked than usual. Alfred was walking quickly and nervously, looking over his shoulder hurriedly this way and that, as if some one were dogging him. Once a dog ran, barking, out of a house, and Alfred turned round swiftly with a white face and an exclamation of fright. Mr. Sheldrake watched these symptoms of agitation with remarkable keenness; and as Alfred passed clapped him on the shoulder. A cry of alarm escaped from Alfred's trembling lips, for Mr. Sheldrake's salutation was sudden and violent; seeing who it was, however, Alfred smiled and drew a long breath of relief.

'Who did you think it was, Alf?' asked Mr. Sheldrake, to whom Alfred's manner seemed to be in some way a satisfaction.

'I didn't know, you clapped me on the shoulder so suddenly.'

'You gave a cry,' observed Mr. Sheldrake, with assumed carelessness, 'for all the world as if I were a detective officer. Don't start; I'm not. That's one comfort, isn't it?'

'I don't see how it is a comfort,' said Alfred half sullenly, and yet with an air which showed that he wished not to offend his companion; 'I'm nervous, that's the fact. Been smoking and drinking a little too much; I shall be all right next Tuesday, after the City and Suburban's run.'

'Going to Epsom to see the race?'

'Yes; I hope you'll do what you promised.'

'We'll talk of that presently. You've got the tip, of course?'

'Yes, and a good one; but there's something else I'm going to do if you'll stand my friend once more.'

'A new system?'

'Well, not exactly that: but a plan which *must* prevent the chance of loss.'

'That's good enough, Alf,' said Mr. Sheldrake in a light tone. 'But come, I want to have a talk with you.' They were at the gate of Mr. Musgrave's house. 'Let us turn in here.'

Lizzie opened the door, and greeted them with a smile. Mr. Sheldrake had not seen her since the night they were at the theatre together, and, remembering how she had spoken to him then, he was somewhat surprised at her amiability. He was still more surprised when Lizzie said she

hoped he had not taken offence because she spoke so sharply to him.

'I was so anxious about Lily, you see,' she said; 'and even Alfred had to put up with my bad temper. Didn't you, Alf?'

'Yes, dear,' replied Alfred, pleased with her changed manner towards his friend.

'Well, well,' said Mr. Sheldrake, gaily shaking hands again with Lizzie, 'let bygones be bygones. Is the old man at home?'

'No,' replied Lizzie readily; 'I don't think he will be back for an hour.'

'We'll go into his room,' said Mr. Sheldrake, and he and Alfred went up-stairs to the room where Mr. Musgrave transacted his business, and which Lizzie had called Bluebeard's room, because she was never allowed to enter it. Mr. Sheldrake had a private key, and before he opened the door, he turned to Lizzie, who had accompanied them to the landing, and tapping her familiarly on the cheek, told her to go down-stairs, that he and Alfred would not keep her long, and that he was glad she thought better of him.

'Upon my word,' he said with blithe significance, 'I'm as glad for Alfred's sake as I am for my own.'

And with a light laugh he led the way into the room. If he had seen the change that came over the girl's face when he shut the door upon her, and if he had seen her clench her little fists, and shake them at an airy picture of himself which she conjured up, he might have altered his agreeable tone. His manner also changed directly the door was closed and locked. All his cordiality vanished as he sat down at the table and took a pocket-book from his pocket. Alfred watched him apprehensively.

Everything in this Bluebeard's room betokened order and system. Two sides of the room were completely covered with pigeon-holes, and the compartments were nearly filled with documents neatly folded and ticketed. Although, from the appearance of the room and the shelves, a large amount of work was evidently gone through, not a loose document nor a scrap of writing was lying about. This circumstance appeared to give Mr. Sheldrake much satisfaction, and he nodded his head approvingly as he looked around. He did not waste time, however, but proceeded at once to the business before him. Opening his pocket-book, he selected some papers from it, and laid them on the table.

'Sit down, Alf,' he said.

Alfred obeyed. Mr. Sheldrake unfolded the papers, and jotted down some figures from them; and laying his hand upon them, as if he did not immediately intend to refer to them, said,

'I have been to your new house to-day, Alf.'

'I called at your place yesterday,' said Alfred, 'to tell you about the fire, and where we had moved to, but you were not at home.'

'No; and I kept from Soho purposely. I was angry with Lizzie, and I was not pleased with your sister. They will have to learn, if they have not learned already, that I am not to be trifled with.'

Alfred had no reply to make to this; he felt that his best plan would be to listen quietly, and to say as few words as possible.

'By heavens!' exclaimed Mr. Sheldrake, with more passion than he usually displayed, 'I think I have been patient long enough—too long. No other man but me would have stood it. Every advance that I make—except,' he added with a sneer, 'those advances I make to you—is met as if I were an enemy instead of a friend. It is time for this to be settled. I'll know very soon whether I'm to be friend or foe. I can be as good an enemy

as a friend, and that I'll prove. With you, now, which is it, friend or foe ?

'Which *can* it be,' answered Alfred moodily, 'but friend ?'

'Out-and-out friend, eh ? No half-measures—thorough !'

'Thorough, out-and-out !' responded Alfred a little less despondently.

'No beating about the bush ? No concealments, no double-dealing ?'

'None.'

'And you say this,' pursued Mr. Sheldrake with remorseless tenacity—he had been so goaded that it was necessary he should revenge himself upon some one—'you say this not because it is for your interest to say it—not because you are in my debt, and I could shut you up at any moment I please—but because you believe it, because you know that I am straightforward, honest-minded, open-hearted ?'

'What other motive can I have for saying it ?'

'But say it plainly. You wish me to continue your friend, and to be my friend, for the reasons that I have given ?'

'Yes, for those reasons, and no other.' And as Alfred spoke the lie which was forced from him

by fear, Mr. Sheldrake laughed lightly, and with an open scorn of the avowal, which brought the blood to the younger man's cheek.

It brought the blood also to the cheek of another person, not in the room. Crouching outside the door, at the top of the landing, was Lizzie, listening with beating heart, and hearing every word that passed. She could see clearly everything in the room, and being in the dark herself, could not be detected. A small lumber-room, the door of which she had partly opened, and which swung noiselessly on its hinges, was ready to afford her the means of concealment should the suspicions of Mr. Sheldrake be aroused. She saw the insolent triumphant manner of Mr. Sheldrake, and she thought for a moment that if she were a man, she would kill him; but she saw also the abject manner of her lover, and her passion was subdued by fear.

'If I thought you were deceiving me, Alf,' said Mr. Sheldrake, 'I should know what to do.'

'What makes you speak in this way to me?' Alfred mustered up sufficient courage to ask. 'If you doubt me, try me.'

'I will. I was at your house to-day, as I have told you. I offered your grandfather assistance;

he declined it. Both he and Lily were anything but cordial to me. For the old man I don't care one jot; but he influences Lily, and has power over her. She follows the cue he gives her. The old man said they wanted for nothing; that they had a friend, who had come forward at the nick of time—a friend, said that railway man's little girl, that they all loved—old man, little girl, Lily, and all.'

Mr. Sheldrake bit his lips at the remembrance of the blush which had come to Lily's cheek when Pollypod asked her if she didn't love this friend.

'Children talk all sorts of nonsense,' said Alfred, 'and Polly more than most children.'

'Perhaps; but that isn't the question just now. Who is this friend, this paragon, this model of goodness, that everybody loves?'

Alfred hesitated for one moment only. Felix had asked them, as a particular favour, not to mention his name as having befriended them, and they had given him the promise. But Alfred felt that to hesitate now, and to beat about the bush with Mr. Sheldrake in that gentleman's present humour, would be fatal to him. So he answered,

'His name is Felix Creamwell. He is an old acquaintance.'

‘I thought so; the same young cub who interrupted my conversation with Lily after we came from the theatre. What is the special tie that binds him to your people?’

This direct questioning of Felix's motive for befriending them staggered Alfred. It had never occurred to him before; and with the sudden introduction of the subject came a glimpse of light—a new revelation—which enabled him but dimly at present to place a possible correct construction on Lily's unhappiness. Policy impelled him to reply,

‘Friendship for my grandfather, I suppose.’

But he stammered over the words, and Mr. Sheldrake said sharply,

‘You don't seem quite certain as to his motive, Alf.’

‘I know that there's a great friendship between him and my grandfather,’ said Alfred, and with a fuller consciousness of what was at stake; ‘and although I have never asked myself the question, I should say that what he has done has been prompted by friendship.’

‘Not by love?’

‘Love for whom?’ inquired Alfred in his turn, with ready cunning.

'Well, let that pass,' replied Mr. Sheldrake, only too willing not to have his doubts confirmed. 'I daresay I can make the account even between us, if we ever come across each other. I *know* I can make it even with you. He has a motive, doubtless, and I don't believe in disinterested friendship. Now we will come to our own business.' He took the papers which he had laid aside, and looked over them. 'You know what these are?'

'I see some of my bills among them.'

'Accounts of money you owe me—dishonoured acceptances, and other documents equally valuable. Here is your bill for sixty pounds, due three weeks since, dishonoured, and for which you were served with a writ.'

'As a mere matter of form, I understood you to say,' put in Alfred, trembling.

'I have obtained judgment upon it, nevertheless.'

'What for?'

'So as to be ready for you,' said Mr. Sheldrake coolly, 'in case I find you are playing the double with me. It will be best for you to understand at once that I am in serious earnest. Miss Lizzie would not say many more uncivil things to me if

she knew this. I suppose you couldn't say how much you owe me?"

'I haven't kept an account.'

'It being no business of yours. Well, I have, feeling interested in it, naturally; and what between me and Con Staveley, the debt is as near three hundred pounds as possible. Is it convenient to you to settle this small account?"

'You know it isn't,' answered Alfred, with a groan; and added entreatingly, 'If you will advance me what you promised for the City and Suburban, I shall be able to pay you a good lump after the race.'

'How if you lose?"

'I can't lose! I must win; I must! Even if I didn't do what I am going to do—even if I trusted entirely to chance—luck must turn. You have told me so yourself a dozen times. But I don't depend upon that.'

'How much do you want?"

'Forty pounds;' and Alfred twined his fingers nervously. Indeed, it seemed to him, as it had seemed a dozen times in the course of the year gone by, that the result was a certainty, if he had only the money to back his opinion. 'If I can but once get clear,' he thought, not for the

first time, 'I'll never back another horse as long as I live—never, never!'

It was not his debt to Mr. Sheldrake that pressed so heavily upon him; there was a sharper and more terrible sword hanging over him.

'What horses would you back for this money, Alf?'

Alfred, encouraged by a tinge of the old cordiality in Mr. Sheldrake's tone, answered confidently:

'I would put ten pounds on Xanthus, and twenty pounds on Kingcraft.'

'And the other ten pounds?'

'I want that to speculate with on the race-course on the day of the race.'

'No,' said Mr. Sheldrake in a decided tone, 'I can't consent to that. I shall give you no money in hand to play ducks and drakes with.'

'Well, then, I will put it *all* on Kingcraft and Xanthus—fifteen pounds on Xanthus, and twenty-five on Kingcraft.'

'What makes you fancy Kingcraft? Xanthus I know is good—all the papers speak up for him.'

'Didn't Kingcraft win the Derby?' cried Alfred excitedly. 'I'm told that the horse has come

back to his old form, and that he's certain to win. A man told me who knows all about it. The stable have been keeping it dark, and they're all going to put their money on. I shall be able to pay you every penny back, and I shall never know how to thank you enough. I've told Liz and Lily that no man ever had such a friend as you are to me, and I'll tell them again. Will you do it for me ?'

'Let me see. The odds about Kingcraft are——'

'Fifteen to one,' interposed Alfred eagerly; 'and six to one about Xanthus. I only back Xanthus to save myself. One or other is certain to pull off the race.'

'Very well ; I'll give you the odds myself.'

'You will ! You are a trump, and no mistake. How can I thank you ! Are you making a book on the race ?'

'Yes, and it will be better for you that I should take the bet rather than anybody else ; for then,' he added, with a quiet chuckle, 'the money will be safe.'

'Yes, that it will,' said Alfred in all sincerity. 'Fifteen to one to twenty-five pounds—that will be three hundred and seventy-five pounds if I

win on Kingcraft, and ninety pounds if Xanthus wins.'

He felt as if he had the larger sum already in his pocket, and the despair which filled him but a few minutes since was swallowed up in the false hope.

'I will send you the vouchers to-morrow, and now I want *your* voucher for this money that I am going to lend you.'

Always willing enough to give his signature, Alfred waited, pen in hand, while Mr. Sheldrake drew up the paper. It was to the effect that Alfred had borrowed of him forty pounds, with which he had backed two horses named for the City and Suburban Race, to be run at Epsom on Tuesday 23rd of April, and that he promised to pay back the money the Saturday after the race.

Alfred read it carelessly, and remarked, as he signed it,

'This is differently worded to any of the other things I have signed.'

'I have a purpose in drawing it up in this way,' said Mr. Sheldrake, as he folded the paper and placed it in his pocket-book. 'This document and the protested bills would be awkward

things to take to your employers, Messrs. Tickle and Flint, in case you didn't pay, or in case I found that you were playing me false—or in case of other contingencies I need not mention just now. It might induce them to make an immediate examination of the vouchers and books in your care. You are cashier there, I believe, Alf. A tempting thing is the handling of other people's money, Alf—a devilish tempting thing—when one is in debt and wants to get rich too quick.'

'What do you mean?' cried Alfred, with such terror in his face and in his voice that Lizzie on the outside of the door was compelled to cling to the baluster for support. 'For God's sake!——'

'Don't agitate yourself, Alf. I am only putting an extreme case. I hope I may not be driven to such a course. It depends more on others than on yourself. And now I think our little conference is ended. Anything more to say? No? Well, you shall have your vouchers to-morrow.'

Lizzie glided down-stairs noiselessly, and when, a few moments afterwards, Mr. Sheldrake came down and shook hands with her, she ac-

accompanied him to the gate and wished him good-bye with a smile on her lips, although her hand was like ice in his grasp.

'You've tamed that little devil, David,' he mused as he walked along; 'she'll be twice as civil and polite the next time you meet her. Now if Kingcraft pulls off the City and Suburban—— Well, Con Staveley can give the odds. I'll tell Alfred that my book is full, and that, as I can't lay any more, I got Con to take his bets. And Con Staveley needn't pay if the horse wins.'

Lizzie went back to Alfred, and found him racked by despair one moment, buoyed up by hope another. She went up to him and kissed him, saying cheerfully,

'Am I not a good girl, Alf, for behaving so well to Mr. Sheldrake?'

'Yes, dear Liz, you are; I wish I were as good.'

'Nonsense, dear; you're not strong-minded, that's all. And I don't think you love me enough.'

'You mustn't say that, Liz. I love no other.'

'I don't think you do, Alf; but if you loved me as well as I love you, you would not keep secrets from me.'

He looked at her with sudden alarm.

'Secrets, Liz! Who told you I had secrets?'

'My heart,' she replied, with a yearning look, and then, at sight of his troubled face, altered her tone as if she were schooling herself, and said archly, 'Girls are artful guessers. And I'm jealous.'

'Of whom?'

'Of Mr. Sheldrake. You have been talking secrets with him up-stairs; and I have a better right than he to share them with you. I hate that man!' she exclaimed, with flashing eyes. 'There's nothing mean that he wouldn't do; he has a false heart, and his smooth words can't hide his bad thoughts. I saw in his face to-day what seems to be hidden from you. O, how I wish you had never known him!'

'It's of no use wishing, Liz. Perhaps it will all turn out for the best. Don't worry me, there's a dear! I want cheering up badly.'

He laid his head upon the table wearily; his folly had made life very bitter to him. One of its sweetest blessings was his, and he had set it far below worthless things. As Lizzie's arms stole tenderly round his neck, and as her sweet words fell upon his ears, he was conscious that

he had never rightly appreciated her love. He thought now how happy his life might be if he had been contented and honest, and if he had not yielded to temptation.

‘Lizzie,’ he said with his face hidden, ‘I have not acted rightly to you. If I could commence over again——’

‘Nonsense, Alf,’ she interposed, in as cheerful a tone as she could command, for his remark, with the meaning it conveyed, brought the tears to her eyes; ‘I’ll not allow you to speak like that. I should be satisfied if I could see you happier in your mind. You have some grief that you will not let me share, and that pains me. You seem to be frightened of something that you cannot see. I have noticed that you have often been unconscious of what is passing, and that you seem to be listening—— There! as you are now!’

He had risen to his feet with wild eyes, and was listening, with a terrible expression of fear in his face, to the sound of loud voices in the street. The speakers had stopped outside the house, and Alfred crept softly to the window. They passed away presently, and Alfred, with a sigh of relief, returned to Lizzie’s side.

'What's the meaning of this, Alf?' she asked, with a fainting heart. 'I have a right to know. Tell me.'

'Not now,' he replied, taking her cold hand and placing it on his forehead. 'I dare not. If you love me, don't ask me questions. I have been foolish, and have not taken care of myself. It will be all right after next Tuesday, and we'll be happy again as we used to be. Come,' he cried, with an attempt at gaiety, facing her with his hands on her shoulders, 'if you want to do me good, wish me luck next Tuesday.'

'I wish you luck, dear, with all my heart.'

'That's right, Liz; and when you go to bed, pray that I may be lucky, my dear. For if I am, all this trouble will be over, and we'll commence a happy life—you, and I, and Lily. And we'll tell our secret then—our own secret, dearest, that no one knows but you and me.'

He drew her towards him, and she laid her head upon his shoulder. Something in his words made him the consoler now.

'It will have to be told soon, Alf dear, or it will tell itself,' she said, in a tone in which joy and pain were subtly mingled.

'I know it, darling; and I've been working

and trying to get money for you and me and Lil, and bad fortune has pursued me so steadily that I have been driven almost mad. Ah, Liz, I love you! You'll see how I love you when all this trouble comes to an end. And it *will* come to an end now that you've wished me luck, and will pray for it.'

She pressed him in her arms, grateful for his calmer and tenderer mood.

'May I say something to you, dear?' she asked.

'Anything, darling; kiss me first.'

She kissed him, and he said softly,

'What a pity it is that time will not stand still, isn't it, Liz? Now, if we could be like this for a long, long time, what happiness it would be! I almost feel as if I should like to die now, with you in my arms. What is it you want to say, darling?'

'Something about Lily.'

'Dear Lily! Go on.'

'Have you noticed that Mr. Sheldrake has been paying her a great deal of attention?'

'I think he likes her, Liz.'

'You think! You know, you mean. But, Alf, if I had a sister that I loved as you love Lily, and who loved me as Lily loves you, I

would rather see her in her grave than see her placed as Lily is now.'

'Lizzie!'

'I mean what I say, Alf, and you ought to have seen it more clearly before. Do you believe that Mr. Sheldrake has any honourable intentions in his open admiration for Lily?'

'If I thought otherwise—' cried Alfred hotly.

'What would you do?' interrupted Lizzie; 'what *could* you do, placed as you are with that man? He has been working for this, Alf dear, and you haven't seen it. So deep and true is Lily's love for you, that if he were to say to her, "I have your brother in my power, and I can bring misery and shame upon him, and will, if you are cold to me!"—if he were to say this to Lily in his own bad way, and work upon her loving heart in his own bad way—O, Alfred, I could almost pray that somebody would kill him!—if he were to do all this, as he may, I tremble to think what Lily would do.'

'What would she do?' The words came faintly from a throat parched by remorse.

'Can you ask, Alf? What would *I* do for you? To secure your happiness, is there any sacrifice that I would not make? Lily's love for

you, although it is the love of a sister, is not less strong than mine. But I have learnt harder lessons than Lily has had to learn, and I should not be so easily led as she would be. A bad, calculating man, as Mr. Sheldrake is, could work upon such a simple nature as hers more easily than upon mine. I should be strong where she, through innocence and simplicity, would be weak. And when she felt, as she would feel, that any sacrifice of happiness which she would be called upon to make would be made to secure the happiness of a beloved brother——'

'Stop, Lizzie!' cried Alfred, rising in his agitation, and turning from her. 'Stop, for God's sake! I have been blind.'

Yes, he had been blind; and blindly had walked, step by step, to the terrible abyss which lay before him now, deliberately taking with him a pure devoted girl, whom, despite all his selfishness, he loved next in the world to Lizzie. All the sweet memories of his life, until he met Lizzie, were of his sister, and he had conspired against her happiness. He was powerless now to undo the past; but he might atone for it. He silently swore that if he were fortunate on Tuesday he would become a better man.

'I have something else to tell you, Alfred,' said Lizzie, after a long pause. 'Lily is in love.'

'In love! Ah, I see more clearly now, dear Lizzie. With Felix?'

'Yes, a happy life is before her, with that true man, if happily they come together.'

'And he?'

'Loves her.'

'Has he told you?'

'No; but there are things that need no telling. We women know. He has not spoken to her, because, because——'

'Go on, Lizzie.'

'Because he sees what you have been blind to, and out of the nobleness of his heart will not add to her distress.'

'It would have been better for her,' groaned Alfred, 'and for you, if I had never been born.'

'Nay,' remonstrated Lizzie, in a gentle loving tone, 'we must not repine: we must try to do better. Promise—and I will help you, with all my strength, and so will Lily and Felix—ah, you don't know what a heart he has! And your grandfather, Alfred, that good old man——'

'I know what you would say about him, Lizzie. I am punished enough already.'

Indeed, he was very humble and repentant; and, when he went home, he knocked at his grandfather's door. It was dusk, and they could but dimly see each other's faces.

'I have come to ask your forgiveness, sir,' said Alfred.

Old Wheels started to his feet, in joyful agitation. He understood it all immediately.

'My dear boy,' he said, with a sob, taking Alfred's hand. 'Not another word; not another word.'

He pressed the young man to his heart and kissed him. Lily, hearing the voices, came into the passage.

'Come here, Lily,' cried old Wheels. 'Come here, dear child.'

Lily flew into the room, and after the joy that this glad meeting brought to them, they settled down quietly, and talked, and thought, and hoped, while the evening shadows deepened. The tender movements she made towards Alfred and her grandfather, the expressions of exquisite happiness she uttered, almost unconsciously, every now and then, the loving caresses, the musical little

laughs, the words, 'O, I am so happy now! so happy!' that escaped again and again, like music from her lips, delighted the old man.

'We want Lizzie here,' said old Wheels tenderly.

'And Felix,' thought Lily. This reunion seemed to bring Felix nearer to her.

CHAPTER XL.

ON EPSOM DOWNS.

‘PRAY that I may be lucky, my dear.’

Alfred had spoken these words to Lizzie with fullest meaning. He did not ask for a wish ; he asked for a prayer. He was not himself given to praying, but on this night, before he went to bed, he knelt at his bedside for the first time for many, many months, with a distinct devotional purpose, in his mind, and prayed with all his mental power that Kingcraft, the horse he had backed, might win the City and Suburban race on the following Tuesday.

He remained at his devotions for fully a quarter of an hour, and had his grandfather seen him in his attitude of contrition, the old man would indeed have been comforted. But during this quarter of an hour no entreaty for forgiveness of folly and crime passed Alfred’s lips. Remorse he felt, but it was the remorse born of fear.

fresh hope and renewed incentives from them. The papers said that Kingcraft was in blooming health; that the stable believed in him; that a fine jockey was to ride him to probable victory; and that the public were backing him. Even, thought Alfred, in his endeavours to come to a fair conclusion, even if Kingcraft should, by some strange and unaccountable chance, not come in first, what horse was to beat him? For, notwithstanding the honest and upright manner in which the national sport is carried on, strange and unaccountable occurrences do sometimes happen; roguery does occasionally triumph. Well, what horse would win, if Kingcraft came in second instead of first? Xanthus, of course. Xanthus, the horse that was rising daily in popular favour. Were not all the honest and disinterested tribe of prophets and tipsters warning their miserable public to look after him? Said one, 'Xanthus must not be lost sight of;' said another, 'Keep Xanthus on the right side;' said another, 'Put a bit on Xanthus;' said another (a cautious prophet, who never allowed himself to be caught tripping), 'But—if—notwithstanding—nevertheless—such or such a thing occurred to Bertram—or, if Pax is not what is represented—or, if a mistake has

been made in Marmora's trial—or, if Phosphorus gets off badly—or, if Kingcraft has entirely lost his old form—or if, notwithstanding, and nevertheless, with half-a-dozen other horses—why, then, keep your eye on Xanthus; he may be dangerous.' With what zest and animation did Alfred read the words of these inspiring writers! How attentively he studied their elegant English, and read their prophecies again and again! They all spoke well of Kingcraft, but none gave the horse as the absolute winner. Well, but was not Alfred as good a judge as any of them? Had not the secret been revealed to him, as it was to Daniel, in a night-vision? But the course of reading such worshippers as he go through is of an intensely distracting nature, and Alfred could not be blind to the fact that there were other horses that might have a chance. If he only had some money to back these horses, and to back Kingcraft and Xanthus to be first, second, or third, in the race, winning would be an absolute certainty, beyond the possibility of doubt. On Saturday morning he rushed to the sporting papers, and read dozens of columns concerning the race. Some of the most respectable and reputable of these papers gave Xanthus as the winner, coupling him, however,

in most instances, with other horses. Alfred was tortured by doubt—now thinking this, now that, until his mind was in a whirl of bewilderment over the miserable affair. Other papers gave other horses as the certain winners. One said, Pax or Bertram would win ; another, Pax or Bridgewater ; another, Bertram or Hector ; and so on and so on ; and Alfred had not backed one of these horses. If either of them won, he was ruined past redemption. But his favourite prophet had to speak yet ; a prophet whose name was in every backer's mouth. On Monday morning this prophet would unbosom himself, and Alfred determined to wait till then before he decided his course of action.

He went by train to his office, and on Monday he read the deliverances of his favourite prophet as he sat in the railway carriage. The prophecy recorded, with an appearance of satisfaction, that backers of certain horses who had made their bets weeks ago had burnt their fingers, as the horses they had backed would not run in the race. The horse named Pax, who held the position of first favourite, had been backed heavily in every part of the country by those connected with the stable ; the owner, it was said, having played a waiting

game with his horse, now intended to win a fortune with him. Alfred's prophet declared he did not believe in Pax, although, after the usual fashion of prophets, he put in a saving clause in a few words which he could quote by and by, in proof of his own sagacity, in case the horse should win. He pinned his faith, after much wavering, on Xanthus and Bertram, chiefly on the former, and in an elaborate and confusing summing-up, declared, in capital letters, that one of these must win, and that either Kingcraft or Marmora would be certain to be among the first three. Alfred was much excited by the hopes held out in this prophecy; and, with some difficulty, obtained from his employers leave of absence for the following day. He had not been too attentive to his duties lately, and his employers demurred at first; but he pleaded the fire that had taken place in Soho, and said that his sister and grandfather required his assistance to set their new home in order. 'You shall have no cause to complain of me after this,' he said humbly, and received a reluctant assent to absent himself from his duties. He stopped at the office later than usual that evening, and was very careful and painstaking in what he did. Early in the morning he was up and away. He

had told Lizzie that he was going to the races, but had made her promise not to let any one know. Lily and old Wheels supposed he was going to his office as usual, and they stood at the window watching him with smiling faces. Lily kissed her hand to him as he looked back, and he waved his gaily towards the window, and smiled brightly.

'A great change has come over him,' said old Wheels thoughtfully, 'for the better, thank God. It makes you happier, Lily.'

'Yes, dear; and you too. Things seem brighter and happier than they did a little while ago. He is coming back to us!'

She ran down-stairs, and old Wheels followed her. Alfred was at the door.

'I've come back to give you another kiss,' he said; 'you looked so pretty standing at the window, that I could not help it.'

'Prettier than Lizzie?' she asked saucily and affectionately.

'As pretty, I do believe,' he replied gaily, and shook hands with old Wheels, whose face, notwithstanding its kind expression, had a trace of seriousness in it.

'Isn't he good?' asked Lily, as she and old

Wheels stood at the gate. 'Dear Alf! See! He's running into Lizzie's house, and Lizzie's opening the door for him!'

'I have had such nice dreams about you,' said Lizzie, as she stood in the passage with Alfred's arm around her.

He laughed blithely, and took her face between his hands, and kissed her lips seven times.

'Because seven's a lucky number, Liz.'

'O, that's the reason!' she cried, with a little toss of her head.

'Yes,' he replied merrily, 'and not because I love you the least bit in the world. Here's seven more—and seven more—three times seven.'

And, the charm being complete, he pressed her in his arms again, and darted away.

There was something more than idle meaning in his words; in the excited state of his mind he was impelled to place an important construction upon every little incident that occurred. It was not merely an affectionate impulse that caused him to turn back and kiss Lily again. Something seemed to whisper to him, 'If you don't go back, you will be unlucky to-day;' and if he had resisted the impulse, he would have fretfully made that the cause of any ill-luck that might befall him.

In the same manner, he kissed Lizzie the number of times which seemed to him to bear the most fortunate significance. In this way he strove to make assurance doubly sure, and drew the most favourable auguries from his attention to these details, connecting them, with strange sophistry, with the great stake he was about to play. Once as he walked he passed under a ladder; and the thought occurring to him that it was an unlucky omen, he retraced his steps, so as to undo the evil consequences that might result from his act, and walked outside the ladder the second time, and congratulated himself upon his wisdom. When he was in the train that was to convey him to Epsom, he bought the newspapers containing the last outpourings of his favourite prophet upon the City and Suburban race. He read a glowing account of the appearance of the course, of 'straggling gipsy women wandering about,' of 'knots of men in the middle of the road, or leaning against the public-house corners, talking in quiet and almost solemn tones, which indicated that they were absorbed in considerations much more important to them than racing—the means of living from hand to mouth, of which one sees so much on the turf.' He read how one individual 'in the

centre of these groups, footsore, wretched, ragged, and deplorable, had formerly been a tout in highly prosperous circumstances, and absolutely won close upon 1500*l.* when Blair Athol won the Derby;’ and how this unfortunate man was ‘exciting the compassion of his almost equally forlorn companions by narrating how he had walked, or rather crawled, for weeks by road from Liverpool, as nigh starving as makes no matter.’ He read how the mysterious horse, known as Pax, was conveyed to the scene of action in high state, in a ‘private van drawn by four gray horses;’ and how his owner and backers, confident of victory, declared, in racing phraseology, that the horse would ‘walk in.’ This and much more Alfred read, and then came to the kernel—the prophecy—which stated that either Pax, Xanthus, Bertram, Kingcraft, or Phosphorus would be certain to win, and that of the five, Xanthus, Bertram, and Kingcraft were the three upon which this wise prophet pinned his faith. Alfred looked round triumphantly. The carriage in which he was seated was crowded, and the occupants were reading the prophets’ predictions in the newspapers with avidity. Alfred, fingering some crisp bank-notes in his pocket, soon made up his mind as to his course of action.

He had twenty new 5*l.* bank-notes, and these he would judiciously invest upon all five of the horses named by his favourite prophet, backing them all to win and to be in the first three, in such proportions as to be certain to win. He took pencil and paper from his pocket, and made his calculations; so much upon one horse, so much upon another, and so much upon the others, at the current odds. Against one of the horses named—Phosphorus—he could get as much as forty to one. He would put 20*l.* upon this horse, so as to gain 800*l.* if the horse won. He gloried at the thought of it. By the time the train reached Epsom he had made his calculations, and had determined so to invest that he could win from a hundred to nearly a thousand pounds. ‘How happy I shall be to-night,’ he thought, ‘with the money in my pocket! I’ll be at the office early in the morning to make everything straight, and then——’ The perspective that stretched itself out in his imagination was too delightfully vague for words or distinct thought. It contained a hazy vista of delight, and in this he basked, and saw Lizzie and himself, and Lily and Felix perhaps, the happiest of the happy.

It was a bright clear morning, and a fresh

breeze was blowing over the Surrey Downs. Gipsies, beggars, thieves, sharpers, and others of that ilk were about and on the alert, and Alfred moved briskly through them to the scene of action. Every species of rascaldom was there represented, and the noble sport afforded a lawful outlet for roguery in every shape—for roguery in broadcloth as well as roguery in fustian. There was something hideous in the Babel of sound round the betting-men, and everything that was degrading in the features which most prominently presented themselves. The first race was a race between two horses, and was in no respects interesting. Alfred paid no attention to it, nor to the two races which followed. He was too busy 'getting his money on' for the great event of the day, which was the fourth on the card. He staked his money with men whom he considered to be good—that is, 'sufficient,' as Shylock has it—and when the bell rang to announce the appearance of the horses on the course, he had but five shillings left. But his pockets would soon be filled. His mind was thronged with intricate calculations, as to how much he would win if this horse that he had backed came in first and that second, or that first and this second; as to how much he would win

under the most favourable circumstances, supposing three of his horses came in first, second, and third. Indeed, he worked himself into a state of belief that it was certain two of his horses would be first and second; and if fortune favoured him out and out, he would go home with twelve hundred pounds in his pocket. Losing was an impossibility. If a shadow of doubt intruded itself, he banished it instantly by a reference to his prophet. Twelve hundred pounds! He parcelled it out. So much to pay Mr. Sheldrake—so much to replace what he had 'borrowed' from the office—so much left. There they were! All the horses were out, and the course was clear. Such bright colourings of jockeys' caps and jackets—such grand action from the beautiful creatures they bestrode—such confident smiles on some of the jockeys' lips—such eager scrutinising on the part of anxious investors. There was Kingcraft—there Xanthus—there Bertram—there Phosphorus—there Pax, that was to bring anything but peace to those who believed in him. Alfred had no eyes for any others. On these his hopes and salvation were staked. Away they went—thirty of them in all—in a gay line to the starting-post; and they pranced, and hung back, or were held back by

astute jockeys, or falsely started, for at least an hour. Alfred was ablaze with excitement, and was eating his heart away with impatience. Another false start—another—another. This torture of suspense was agonising. At last they were off, and Alfred, craning forward, muttered the names of Lizzie and Lily for luck. Away they sailed over the hill to Tattenham-corner. In little more than two minutes the mile and a quarter was compassed, and there came in, first, Digby Grand; second, Lord Glasgow; third, Hector. Not one of the prophet's five horses was in the first three, and Alfred had not backed one of the winning horses for a penny. He put his hand to his forehead, to clear away the mist; but it gathered upon him thicker and thicker. He could not distinguish a face in all the throng of persons around him. A man behind him placed his hand somewhat firmly on Alfred's shoulder, with the intention of passing him.

'No, no!' cried Alfred hoarsely, cowering down. But the man passed on, not heeding him; and Alfred, hiding his face as well as he could, slunk through the crowd to the rear of the race-course, bearing in his face and manner the air of a hunted animal, with death on his track.

CHAPTER XLI.

ON THE WATCH.

WHEN Alfred was clear of the crowd, he paused for a moment, and looked around with a vacant stare. In that moment his eyes fell upon Mr. David Sheldrake, who accosted him gaily. Alfred's parched lips moved in response, but no sound came from them. He thought he had spoken aloud, however, and his eyes, after the first swift recognition of Mr. Sheldrake, sought the ground miserably. Mr. Sheldrake made a pretence of not observing Alfred's uneasiness, and he went on to say airily, that he had had a slice of good luck in the City and Suburban, and that he had strolled away from the betting-ring to cool his excitement.

'I was looking for you before the race,' he said; 'I wanted to give you the tip. I was told by the best jockey of the day that Digby Grand

•

could not be beaten, and I backed the horse, and I wanted you to back it also. But perhaps you did.'

He paused for a reply, but Alfred said no word. He was in a stupor of despair. Mr. Sheldrake continued,

'You'll be able to square up now, I suppose. I don't care so much for myself, although, of course, the money will come acceptable, but Con Staveley swears he'll be down on you to-morrow. He says he'll go to your place of business, and if you don't pay, he'll split on you to your employers. That would be serious, wouldn't it? I should advise you not to have anything more to do with Con; he's a hard nail. How much have you won? A couple of monkeys at least, I hope. You must let me into the secret of that new system of yours.'

Still no reply from Alfred. Mr. Sheldrake's tone grew grave. He laid his hand upon Alfred's arm, and Alfred shivered at the touch, and feebly endeavoured to shake off the grasp.

'I must insist upon an answer, Alf. Have you won or lost?'

'Lost!' muttered Alfred hoarsely.

'How much?' demanded Mr. Sheldrake.

●

'Every shilling I had in the world. Let go my arm.'

'Be still, or I'll set the police on you! Be still, and tell me,' said Mr. Sheldrake with distinct emphasis, 'how you are going to replace the money you have taken from your office?'

Alfred trembled violently, but did not raise his eyes.

'You wonder how I know, I daresay,' pursued Mr. Sheldrake; 'but I know more than you are aware of. What are you going to do?'

'I don't know,' replied Alfred, and moved away slowly, Mr. Sheldrake following him thoughtfully.

They were not the only actors in this the last act of the sad drama. An old man, whose eyes never left them, was following them watchfully and warily. A pause of several moments ensued. Then Mr. Sheldrake said, weighing every word,

'I don't like to desert an old friend, even when he has behaved shabbily to me, as you have done. It seems to me that, unless something is done for you at once, it is all up with you. You daren't go back to the office till your accounts are squared, and you daren't go home. The detectives will be on the look-out for you. I daresay if Tickle and Flint could get back a portion of the money you

have—we may as well speak plainly—stolen, they would be inclined to let you off. I'll see if I can serve you.'

Alfred's white face was raised imploringly at this glimpse of hope.

'But I must have authority,' continued Mr. Sheldrake, 'I must have something to show your people, and to prove to them, if necessary, that they may trust me. Here—write as I dictate.'

He tore a leaf from his pocket-book, and handed it to Alfred, with a pencil.

'Put the date first—that's right; and the place—Epsom. Now write: "I am in great trouble and danger, and cannot come home; my friend, Mr. Sheldrake, is the only man I can trust, and the only man who can save me. Put full faith and trust in him.—ALFRED."'

Alfred, dazed and helpless, wrote the words, and Mr. Sheldrake took the paper, and placed it in his pocket.

'I must get back to the ring now,' he said, with a friendly nod; 'you know where to find me when you want me.'

With these words he turned away: the old man who had been watching him and Alfred tried to avoid him, but Mr. Sheldrake had left Alfred

'Every shilling I had in the world. Let go my arm.'

'Be still, or I'll set the police on you! Be still, and tell me,' said Mr. Sheldrake with distinct emphasis, 'how you are going to replace the money you have taken from your office?'

Alfred trembled violently, but did not raise his eyes.

'You wonder how I know, I daresay,' pursued Mr. Sheldrake; 'but I know more than you are aware of. What are you going to do?'

'I don't know,' replied Alfred, and moved away slowly, Mr. Sheldrake following him thoughtfully.

They were not the only actors in this the last act of the sad drama. An old man, whose eyes never left them, was following them watchfully and warily. A pause of several moments ensued. Then Mr. Sheldrake said, weighing every word,

'I don't like to desert an old friend, even when he has behaved shabbily to me, as you have done. It seems to me that, unless something is done for you at once, it is all up with you. You daren't go back to the office till your accounts are squared, and you daren't go home. The detectives will be on the look-out for you. I daresay if Tickle and Flint could get back a portion of the money you

have—we may as well speak plainly—stolen, they would be inclined to let you off. I'll see if I can serve you.'

Alfred's white face was raised imploringly at this glimpse of hope.

'But I must have authority,' continued Mr. Sheldrake, 'I must have something to show your people, and to prove to them, if necessary, that they may trust me. Here—write as I dictate.'

He tore a leaf from his pocket-book, and handed it to Alfred, with a pencil.

'Put the date first—that's right; and the place—Epsom. Now write: "I am in great trouble and danger, and cannot come home; my friend, Mr. Sheldrake, is the only man I can trust, and the only man who can save me. Put full faith and trust in him.—ALFRED."'

Alfred, dazed and helpless, wrote the words, and Mr. Sheldrake took the paper, and placed it in his pocket.

'I must get back to the ring now,' he said, with a friendly nod; 'you know where to find me when you want me.'

With these words he turned away: the old man who had been watching him and Alfred tried to avoid him, but Mr. Sheldrake had left Alfred

'Every shilling I had in the world. Let go my arm.'

'Be still, or I'll set the police on you! Be still, and tell me,' said Mr. Sheldrake with distinct emphasis, 'how you are going to replace the money you have taken from your office?'

Alfred trembled violently, but did not raise his eyes.

'You wonder how I know, I daresay,' pursued Mr. Sheldrake; 'but I know more than you are aware of. What are you going to do?'

'I don't know,' replied Alfred, and moved away slowly, Mr. Sheldrake following him thoughtfully.

They were not the only actors in this the last act of the sad drama. An old man, whose eyes never left them, was following them watchfully and warily. A pause of several moments ensued. Then Mr. Sheldrake said, weighing every word,

'I don't like to desert an old friend, even when he has behaved shabbily to me, as you have done. It seems to me that, unless something is done for you at once, it is all up with you. You daren't go back to the office till your accounts are squared, and you daren't go home. The detectives will be on the look-out for you. I daresay if Tickle and Flint could get back a portion of the money you

have—we may as well speak plainly—stolen, they would be inclined to let you off. I'll see if I can serve you.'

Alfred's white face was raised imploringly at this glimpse of hope.

'But I must have authority,' continued Mr. Sheldrake, 'I must have something to show your people, and to prove to them, if necessary, that they may trust me. Here—write as I dictate.'

He tore a leaf from his pocket-book, and handed it to Alfred, with a pencil.

'Put the date first—that's right; and the place—Epsom. Now write: "I am in great trouble and danger, and cannot come home; my friend, Mr. Sheldrake, is the only man I can trust, and the only man who can save me. Put full faith and trust in him.—ALFRED."' '

Alfred, dazed and helpless, wrote the words, and Mr. Sheldrake took the paper, and placed it in his pocket.

'I must get back to the ring now,' he said, with a friendly nod; 'you know where to find me when you want me.'

With these words he turned away: the old man who had been watching him and Alfred tried to avoid him, but Mr. Sheldrake had left Alfred

very suddenly, and the old man's movements were not quick enough. Mr. Sheldrake's sharp eyes lighted upon him instantly.

'Hallo, Muzzy!' he exclaimed. 'What brings you here?'

'I came to see the race run,' said Mr. Musgrave, standing before his employer in a submissive attitude. 'It's my favourite race, and I've not missed a year. I was at the first City and Suburban in 1851, when Elthiron won; and the next year, when Butterfly won; and the next, when Ethelbert ran a dead heat with Pancake. I lost a hatful of money over Pancake, at the very moment I thought I had made a fortune.'

'It's always the way, Muzzy. You're a regular walking racing calendar! Did you back the winning horse this time, old man?'

'No, sir; I had nothing on.'

'Found out the error of your ways, eh? Well, now the race is over, you can do a little business for me. You see that young fellow,' pointing to Alfred, 'who was walking away with hanging head.'

Mr. Musgrave shaded his eyes with his hand.

'My eyes are not so good as they used to be, but I fancy I know him.'

'O, you know him well enough. It's Alfred, Lizzie's young man.'

'Ah, yes; to be sure, to be sure. I recognise him now.'

'Keep your eye on him; watch him; don't let him go out of your sight. I want to know what he's up to, and where he is going to.'

'I suppose he'll go home to-night,' said Mr. Musgrave.

'I am not so sure of that; and if he doesn't, you must see where he puts up, and keep near him. I may want him.'

'For what?'

'What's that to you?' retorted Mr. Sheldrake. 'Perhaps he owes me money, and I don't intend that he shall give me the slip. Perhaps he's lost on the race and can't pay, and I want to do him a service.'

'For the sake of his pretty sister,' suggested Mr. Musgrave humbly.

'You dog, you!' retorted Mr. Sheldrake, half angrily, half approvingly. 'Whatever it is, it's my business, and not yours. Mind that, old man. If you don't want to be turned off at a moment's notice, do as you're told, and ask no questions. And look here, old man, you know the Myrtle

Inn? Well, inquire there the first thing in the morning for a note. I may have to write to you, to give you instructions. And if the place is handy, you can put up there to-night.'

Mr. Musgrave nodded submissively, and crept away in the direction that Alfred had taken.

'Mind,' said Mr. Sheldrake, overtaking him, 'he's not to see you, and not to know that you are watching him. You can drop a line to me to-night, telling me where he puts up. Here's a sov. to pay ex's.'

Although the old man took the sovereign in silence, his manner did not seem to please Mr. Sheldrake, who muttered, as he looked at the slouching figure creeping away,

'I'd give him the sack if I could; but I must get things straight first. He knows too much. I'll square up the concern, and get rid of him this year. I'll have all the books and vouchers moved from Ivy Cottage this very week.'

While this scene was being enacted, Alfred pursued his sad way. His great desire was to escape from the crowd, among which probably there were persons who were acquainted with him. He must get to some place and among people where he could hide himself and would not be known.

Mr. Sheldrake had rightly said that he dared not show his face at the office. To-morrow all would be discovered. It had been his unhappy fortune yesterday to receive an uncrossed cheque, payable to bearer, in settlement of a large account due to his employers. This cheque he had cashed, and had used the proceeds in backing the horses of the false prophet upon whom he had placed all his hopes. This was not the only money he had used ; for some time he had pursued a system of falsifying the books of the firm, and of appropriating such payments as would be the least likely to be missed. Discovery was imminent every day, every hour. All this money had been lost in betting, and in vainly striving to recover what had gone before. Even in the midst of his despair he groaned to himself that he had done his best, that he had tried system after system, prophet after prophet, with the same result ; and that ill-fortune, and not he, was to blame. There was some special reason for each fresh loss—some special reason applicable to that case alone, and which could not by any exercise of forethought have been anticipated or avoided. It brought that smallest of consolation to him which consists in the reflection that the same thing would have happened to

anybody else placed in his position ; but it brought sharp stings also in the reflection that he might have known, or ought to have known, that such and such a thing might have been anticipated, or suspected, or guessed, and the unfortunate result avoided. No consideration of this description, however, intruded itself in what had occurred to-day in his speculations on the City and Suburban race. Here was a prophet, whose name was known to every betting boy and man in the kingdom, who had actually named five horses as the winner of the race, and not one of these five horses came in among the first three. In the eyes of a reasonable being such a circumstance would be sufficient to stamp this prophet as the veriest impostor and incapable that ever put pen to paper ; and he might feel a natural indignation that such mischievous utterances should be openly allowed to lead weak men to acts of folly and crime. Even Alfred, never given to moralising, caring only for himself, and not one jot for the public, cursed this false prophet as he staggered over the Downs, and gave vent to weak imprecations against the man whose cruel prophecies had brought him to this stage of infamy and disgrace.

What would they think at home ? Would they

guess the truth? What would Lizzie do? He thought mostly of her. If he could get to some new country with her, where they could commence a new life, what happiness it would be! If he could undo the past! In the midst of these repinings and vain repentances, the terrible thought intruded itself that there was no escape for him. He had but five shillings in his pocket; every article of jewelry he possessed had been mortgaged to raise money to swell the fatal stake he had played this day. The detectives would soon be after him. Could he disguise himself in any way, so as to escape detection? His nerves were strung up to such a high pitch that the slightest unexpected sound was sufficient to terrify him, and the roar from the distant race-course which proclaimed that another race had been decided was converted by his fears into the shouts of pursuers on his track. He quickened his steps instinctively, preparing for flight, but the next moment his reason returned, and he ascribed the shouts to their correct cause. With a faint smile on his lips, he turned his head in the direction of the cries, and as he turned he suddenly saw Mr. Musgrave. The sight of the old man gave Alfred a shock, and the first thought

which flashed through his mind was that the old man had been set to watch him. That this presumption was the correct one was due, not to Alfred's perspicacity, but to his fears. In his condition, every face that was familiar was a face to be suspected. Alfred cast furtive glances at the old man, who, having seen Alfred's recognition of him, looked about listlessly in every direction but that in which Alfred was. He seemed to have come to the spot entirely by accident, and Alfred was partly thrown off his guard by the old man's manner. 'But I will make sure,' thought Alfred, and he set traps, into which the old man unconsciously fell. Alfred slunk behind a hedge, which was not thick enough to hide him completely from sight, and remaining there for fully a quarter of an hour, watched and waited, and when he emerged into the open plain, the old man was still there, looking about him with ill-concealed listlessness. 'He is watching me!' thought Alfred, trembling in every limb. 'Who set him on? How can I escape?' He had no thought of addressing the old man to ascertain his purpose. No cordiality had grown between them during their acquaintanceship; Alfred knew that in some way Mr. Musgrave was connected in business with

Mr. Sheldrake, and this circumstance was sufficient to convert the old man into a spy, if not into an enemy. Faint, despairing, and weary, Alfred stumbled on across the Downs, and stopped at a quiet inn. The old man was still on his track. Alfred called for brandy, and tried to eat, but the food almost choked him, and he put it aside, sick at heart, and drank more brandy. 'Can you give me a sheet of paper and an envelope?' he asked of the girl who served him. She gave him what he required, and pen and ink as well, and he sat down in the parlour, looking at the blank paper, and trying to think. A voice at the bar roused him. It was Mr. Musgrave's voice asking for refreshments. For a moment Alfred thought of going boldly to the old man, and appealing to him, for Lizzie's sake; but he dismissed the thought immediately. 'It will be betraying myself,' he muttered; 'but I must let Lizzie know. How can I get a letter to her?' He went to the rear of the inn, and asked an ostler if he knew any one who was going to London that afternoon. Yes, the ostler said, a man from the yard was going to London by the next train, which would start in a quarter of an hour. The ostler pointed

out the man to Alfred. Returning to the parlour, Alfred wrote :

‘I have been miserably unfortunate to-day, and I dare not come home. I am at Epsom, and I don't know where to turn for safety. At this very moment I am being watched by an enemy ; you know him well, but I will not pain you by naming him. I have done you injury enough already, and I can never, never atone for it. All hope has left me, and I wish my miserable life were ended. I can only ask you to think kindly of me and to forgive me. If I did not love you, I should not be as unhappy as I am. I am afraid to think of the future.—I send this by a stranger. I want you to get it to-night, and the post would not arrive in time. No one must know that you have heard from me. God knows what will happen to me. I have brought shame and disgrace upon all.—A.’

Alfred enclosed and addressed the letter, and seeing the man going to the railway station, ran after him, and bargained with him to deliver the letter for four shillings, which was all the money he possessed.

‘Don’t deceive me,’ said Alfred imploringly.

‘Do you take me for a thief?’ was the surly answer. ‘The young woman shall have the letter all right. You look as if you’ve been backing the wrong horse, young fellow.’

Alfred did not reply, and when the man was out of sight, walked to a quiet spot, and threw himself on the ground, waiting for night to hide himself and his despair from the sight of man.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE CLOUDS BRIGHTEN FOR LILY.

ALL unconscious of the terrible crisis that was occurring, Lily went about the house that day as blithe as a bird. Her life seemed to be brightening, and the shadows that had hung over it appeared to be clearing away. She ran up and down the stairs, and in and out of the rooms, singing her old songs. She was in the happiest of moods, and her grandfather listened with a grateful heart to her fresh voice. He expressed his delight to Mrs. Podmore, who came down-stairs with Pollypod, dressed for walking. Mrs. Podmore had a basket on her arm.

‘Lily is like her old self again, Mrs. Podmore,’ he said.

‘Bless her heart!’ exclaimed Mrs. Podmore. ‘It does one good to hear her. It’s an ill wind that blows nobody good, and the fire has done Lily

the good turn of sending her here, where the air is fresher for her. Polly likes it, too, don't you?"

'O, yes, mother,' answered the child.

'So we've got to be thankful even for misfortune,' said Mrs. Podmore, with half a sigh. 'It was a hard blow for Jim, though, was that fire. It'll take us a long time to get over it.'

'How much worse it would have been,' said old Wheels, 'if some of us had been hurt and burnt, instead of our clothes and sticks of furniture!'

'Ah, yes, indeed, Mr. Wheels. It's downright wicked to grumble, after all. But I never shall forget it, never! I shall remember Jim carrying Polly and me down the rope, to my dying day. Jim's never been himself since then, Mr. Wheels. I wish he was anything but what he is, and that he could get a living in a reasonable way, where he wouldn't be worked to death as he's being worked now. It ain't fair to flesh and blood, and flesh and blood can't stand it. Dear, dear! here I am grumbling again! I don't know what's come over me. We're going to London, Polly and me, to get one or two little things. We sha'n't be home till night. Can I do anything in town for you, Mr. Wheels?'

‘No, thank you.’

A silence ensued, caused by Lily commencing a verse of a favourite song, which they paused to hear.

‘She sings like a bird,’ said Mrs. Podmore; and added, with a meaning smile, ‘but there’s something else besides fresh air to account for her light-heartedness. Here’s Mr. Felix himself to bear me out in what I say.’

‘And what is that, Mrs. Podmore?’ asked Felix, who entered as she spoke, and heard her last words.

‘Ah, that’s a little secret between me and Mr. Wheels,’ replied Mrs. Podmore with another smile of much meaning, intended especially for the old man; ‘but I’ve got Jim’s dinner in the basket, and I must go and give it to him.’

‘There’s another thing to be thankful for, Mrs. Podmore,’ said old Wheels. ‘Your husband hasn’t so far to go home when his work’s done as he had when we lived in Soho. You see how lucky the fire was, after all, to bring you here to live, so near the station where your husband works.’

‘Well, we know who we’ve got to thank for it,’ replied Mrs. Podmore, with an affectionate look at Felix; ‘don’t we, Polly?’

And with other grateful words, the mother and child left the house.

‘You have come early to-day, Felix,’ said old Wheels; ‘has any particular business brought you?’

Felix, looking both happy and anxious, answered,

‘Yes, sir, one or two very particular things. First, a stroke of good fortune. Through the influence of my friend Charles, of whom I have spoken to you, I am appointed London correspondent to a leading colonial newspaper. By his advice, I sent an initial letter—in my best style, of course; a regular trap for them,’ added Felix, with a light laugh—‘and the result is, that I have obtained the appointment. It adds a hundred pounds a year to my income, and the labour really is very light.’

‘That is good news indeed,’ said old Wheels, rubbing his hands; ‘I congratulate you heartily on it.’

‘I am becoming quite an important person,’ said Felix, with comic seriousness, ‘from a worldly point of view. But there are other matters I wish to tell you of. I have spoken to you of my father’s housekeeper——’

'Martha Day?' interposed old Wheels. 'Yes.'

'She has left my father's service suddenly. I do not think I have told you that Lizzie, Alfred's sweetheart, is related to Martha Day.'

'No; this is the first time I have heard it.'

'It was a matter of no great importance for you to know; but as Martha has left my father's house, and may be more nearly connected with me, it is right that you should be acquainted with everything that concerns me. Martha is with Lizzie at the present moment at Mr. Musgrave's house. And interrupting myself here, it seems strange to me that you and Mr. Musgrave should never have met.'

'It is strange,' said old Wheels, after a little pondering; 'and now that you speak of it, it comes to my mind that, on every occasion when we were expected, in the natural course of things, to meet, sudden business has called Mr. Musgrave away. You are not acquainted with any reasons why he should avoid me?'

'No; I know of none.'

'He is eccentric, perhaps; disinclined to make new acquaintances. Some men are so.'

'He is exceedingly fond of Lily,' observed Felix.

‘That makes it all the more strange,’ said old Wheels, with a thoughtful air; ‘and yet I should not say so. The child would win her way to any heart. It speaks well for him; I am very glad to hear it. Exceedingly fond of Lily, you say!’ He repeated these words, as if he wished to make some obscure thing clear to his understanding.

‘I think he shows more tenderness towards her than towards his adopted daughter. It seems to me as if he feels that he cannot be considerate enough of her. That is Lily singing, is it not?’

‘Yes, the dear child! She is more cheerful than she has been for a long time past.’

Felix listened, with a pleased expression on his face, and the old man watched his attitude and manner with a curious mingling of hope and anxiety. Presently Felix resumed,

‘I am doing nothing but flying off at tangents, and I have so much to say. About Mr. Musgrave: he and I have had confidential business together lately. Business, I hope, which will turn out well.’

‘Profitable?’

‘Well, not in the common sense of the word; that is, it will not put money in my pocket; but it

will do something better perhaps. You will hear of it, I daresay, very soon. Now, about Martha Day. Hers is a strange story. She has lived all her womanly life with my father, as his housekeeper, and has out of her savings brought Lizzie up, given her a tolerable education, and supplied her with money. My father, it appears, knew nothing of this; he supposed that Martha had no family ties. Lately, however, he has discovered her connection with Lizzie, and has discovered something else also. Lizzie, it appears, is not Martha's niece, as I understood; she is her daughter. The story that Martha tells of an early marriage and of being deserted by her husband, who enlisted and died in India, my father refuses to believe. He insisted that Martha should promise not to see Lizzie any more, and Martha indignantly left his service. She has been with him for a great many years, and she says that it suited her; that she was fit for nothing else, and that it supplied her with means to pay for Lizzie's early training. What memories, what fears, or what fanciful idea that Lizzie's future would be happier if she were brought up in the belief that Martha was her aunt, instead of her mother, neither you nor I can guess. The web of the simplest life

seems to me to be made up of tangled skeins, and one of the highest duties of life consists in kindly judgment of each other. Martha's life has been one of sacrifice, and what joy and comfort she has experienced in it have come from this girl, for whom I have a great esteem.'

'I too, Felix; Lizzie is a good girl.'

'It sounds strange that so simple a circumstance should induce my father to part with a woman who must have been wonderfully useful to him; but I think I am to blame for the severance of that connection.'

'In what way?'

'My father knows of my movements, so Martha tells me; knows of my friendship for you and your grandchildren, and knows of the tie which binds Alfred to Lizzie. It is in some way to punish me that he has provoked this breach; but, indeed, it is no punishment to me, for I believe and hope that it will turn out for the good of all of us.'

'Is there no hope of a reconciliation with your father, Felix?'

'None, sir,' replied Felix firmly; 'our natures are too wide apart. In all probability, we shall never meet again: both he and I are too steadfast

to our beliefs, and these are as the north and the south poles. It is wonderful by what roads men arrive at totally different estimates of things, and of the best things of life. My father will judge me harshly, perhaps, all the days of his life ; but he is my father, and it will best become me to be silent as to his judgments and motives. I am but a young man, but it seems to me that my life is clear before me. I do not aspire to riches. I have one great hope, and if that is fulfilled, I shall be content to work with others of the world's workers, satisfied with moderate competence, proud if the track in which I work will enable me to leave a mark for good behind me. I have flown off at a tangent again, and must come back to Martha. Looking upon myself as the cause of her misfortunes, I purpose to set up some sort of a home, in which she can live in the same capacity as she has done in my father's house.'

'What does she say to your plan, Felix?'

'She is delighted with it; but she will say nothing decisive until after she has talked to Lizzie about it, and until after the result of my visit here to-day is ascertained. Acting upon my advice, Martha is telling Lizzie the secret

which she has kept all her life, and Lizzie probably knows by this time that she has a mother. Now, sir, I come to my one great hope. My position seems to justify me in doing so, and I have waited until now, when not only that seems to be in some way assured, but when another matter which has caused you and Lily much anxiety—I refer to Alfred's connection with Mr. Sheldrake—looks less hopeless than it has done for some time past. If you guess what it is I am about to say, will you give me permission to speak more plainly ?

‘Speak, my dear lad,’ said old Wheels, trembling with eagerness.

‘It is about Lily——’

But the old man rose suddenly, and in a tone of deep agitation said,

‘One moment, Felix.’

It was joy at the prospect of his darling's happiness that compelled him to rise. He stood with averted head, silent for many moments ; then turned, and said, with the tears running down his face,

‘Go on, Felix ; go on, my dear boy.’

‘I love Lily, sir, and I ask your permission to tell her, and to ask her to be my wife.’

Old Wheels grasped Felix's hand.

'God bless you, my dear lad!' he almost sobbed. 'These are tears of joy that you see. How I have prayed for this! But I feared that some scruple of just feeling—some motive of honour and tenderness, for which I should not have esteemed you less, Felix; no, not one whit—I feared that something of this sort might have prevented you from speaking. The sad day that we met is the happiest of my life. God bless you, Felix! Go to my darling; go to her, and then come down to me together, that I may see my dearest desire accomplished.'

Lily, very busy setting things to rights in the house, and very happy in her work, did not know that Felix had come, until he stood close to her. She gave a little cry of surprise and pleasure, and then, seeing something in his face that she had never seen before, stood for an instant pale and trembling. But her heart was animated by the dawn of a tender hope. His nature was too earnest to dally at such a time. He held out his hand, and retaining hers, said,

'I have come straight from grandfather, Lily.'

And paused, as earnest lovers do who are about to play their great stake. She stood silent, her hand in his, waiting for him to speak.

‘I have been telling him of some good fortune that has befallen me. I have obtained another London correspondenceship for a colonial paper, and I am growing rich. My income is quite three hundred pounds, and there is a fair prospect before me. I have schemes in my head. One of these fine days I may put the finishing lines to a book, and by good luck I may find a publisher who will publish it; or to a play, and by good luck I may find a manager who will produce it. Whichever it is may be successful, and another hundred pounds may come in my purse. If I do not do either, or if I am unsuccessful in the doing, my position is good enough, and I shall be happy and satisfied, even if it does not improve very much. But I want a home—a helpmate. And there is but one woman in the world who can be to me what my heart yearns for. Lily!’ He had released her hand, and she stood before him with drooping head; the sun was shining behind the bright clouds. ‘Will you be my wife?’

Whether he took her into his arms, or whether she crept into them, neither knew; but she

was there, with her head on his breast, and with such joy in her heart as seemed to make life too happy. A long silence followed, a silence that was like a prayer; their feelings were too deep for words, and when, after a long, long dream, they spoke, their voices were tremulous.

‘Are you glad, Lily?’

She nestled closer to him.

‘Lily, my dear, I devote my life to your happiness.’

‘And I to yours, Felix.’ She spoke the words softly and solemnly.

‘So I have two objects in life, and these will be sufficient—my wife and my work.’

He repeated the words ‘My wife!’ tenderly. She raised her bright face to his.

‘And I have but one.’

‘That is——’

‘Felix.’

His pulses were charged with grateful music as he stooped and kissed her.

‘Love and Labour would not be a bad motto, Lily, or a bad title for my book or play. Let us go down to grandfather.’

‘You perceive, sir,’ said Felix to old Wheels

a quarter of an hour afterwards, 'what my scheming has come to. The first time I saw Lily, I thought to myself, There is my wife; and I schemed for the result. I have acted my part very well, I think. Now, will you still dispute my proposition that every action in our lives is dictated by selfishness?'

Felix and Lily were sitting hand in hand.

'I am too happy, Felix,' replied old Wheels, 'to dispute anything with you; you must have everything your own way. I have no doubt that Lily has made up her mind—as I have made up mine—that you are as heartless and selfish as it is possible for man to be.'

But a little while after that Lily and Felix were speaking together more seriously. In the suddenness of her happiness, Lily had lost sight for a time of Alfred's troubles. Now they recurred to her, and brought with them the image of Mr. Sheldrake and the memory of his threats. Felix saw the change that came over her, and guessed the cause.

'You are thinking of Alfred,' he said. 'To-night, when he comes home, we will take him into our confidence, and coax him to confide freely in us. I know your love for him, Lily, and you

know, my dear, that nothing that is in my power shall be left undone to release him from his anxieties.'

Then, without being asked, Lily told Felix all that had passed between her and Mr. Shelldrake; she told him first of Mr. Shelldrake's confession of love for her, and how it terrified her; and then, going back, she told him of their meeting in Bushey Park, and of her seeing Lizzie for the first time on that day; of the story of Mr. Shelldrake's goodness that Alfred had related to her (Felix smiled gravely at this); of the persistent manner in which Mr. Shelldrake had impressed upon her that it was for her sake, and for her sake only, he was her brother's friend; of Mr. Shelldrake forcing a partnership upon her on that day, suggesting that they should enter into a compact to work together for Alfred's good; and of his saying that when Alfred was safely through his troubles, he would have no one but Lily to thank for his release.

'But since that day,' continued Lily, 'Alfred has been getting into deeper and deeper trouble, until a time came—only a little while ago, Felix—when I was afraid to think of what might occur to him—and to me,' she added, in a dreamy tone.

A moment after she had uttered the words a shudder came over her. Felix took her in his arms, and she clung to him for protection.

‘I feel happy and safe with you, Felix.’

‘I understand your feelings towards Alfred, my dear,’ said Felix encouragingly; ‘but I must have my treasure grow strong, and I must strive to wean her from her dreamy fancies. I shall watch my sensitive flower very jealously, and she must trust to my judgment wholly. You have doubts! Why, I have had them! and for a long time have been afraid to speak. So you see, little weakling, that I, strong as I am, have shared some of your anxieties with you. I saw you on the day you went to Hampton Court with Alfred.’

‘You, Felix!’

‘Yes, my dear; I was there, watching over you even then, although I had not the right to do so that I have now.’

‘And you would not come to me and speak to me, Felix!’

‘Dearest! I saw that you were happy, and I felt that I might have been the cause of disturbance, of which Mr. Sheldrake probably would have been glad to avail himself. So I kept myself in the background.’

'And suffered,' she said, wistfully and tenderly; 'for you loved me then, Felix; I know it.'

'Yes, darling. I loved you then. But love often shows itself in self-sacrifice.'

She paused for a little while before she spoke again. 'You said once, Felix, that there is a higher attribute than love—duty!'

'How do you know I said that, Lily?'

'Grandfather told me. Do you believe that duty is a higher quality than love? That supposing these two stand before us, duty on one side, love on the other, duty should be followed and love put aside?'

'Can you not take your answer, Lily, from what I hinted to you on the night you came from the theatre? Duty *should* be followed first; much that is bitter in life it makes sweet. But when love and duty clash, we should examine ourselves strictly, sternly perhaps, out of justice for others——'

'As you did, Felix,' she interrupted in loving tones, 'when you restrained yourself from telling me your feelings until to-day. Ah, I know! Love has made me wise. Now we will not talk of this any more now; we shall have plenty of time by

and by. How I have thought over every word you said to me that night, Felix !'

'Every word, Lily !'

'Yes, every word ; you made me very happy !'

'Darling ! But you could not repeat to me what I said.'

'One part I could.'

'I am listening !'

'You said, it is the dearest privilege of affection to share the troubles of those we love. If I were married (you said), the first consoling thought that would arise to my mind, should misfortune overtake me, would be, "Thank God, I have one at home who will sympathise with me, and by her sympathy console me !"' She paused awhile, and said, 'This privilege is mine now, and love and duty can go together.'

In this way, she poured out her full heart to him. His duties called him away in the afternoon, and he left her, saying he would run down in the night, at about ten o'clock, for an hour.

'We will wait supper for you, Felix,' said old Wheels.

Felix went his way to town, the happiest of the happy.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MR. SHELDRAKE MAKES A BOLD MOVE.

TEA was over, and Lily and her grandfather were sitting by the fire. The night without was chilly, although it was now the middle of spring, and a raw cold wind was blowing. But the room was warm and cozy, and the occupants were thoroughly happy. Lizzie and Martha Day had been to see them in the afternoon, and had spent an hour or two with them. When Lizzie came in, she said simply, 'Lily, this is my mother;' and both received a warm welcome from old Wheels and his darling child. Martha's pale face had a flush of happiness in it, and the sombre effect of her black dress had been lightened by Lizzie, who had insisted on her mother's wearing one or two pieces of bright ribbon. Yet, notwithstanding the joy which the disclosure of their nearer and dearer relationship must have brought to both Lizzie and

Martha Day, uneasy shades of expression rested occasionally on their features. The cause of this uneasiness in Lizzie seemed to be entirely within herself, and to be in no way connected with any person present in the room; but with Martha it was different. It was evident that her uneasiness was caused in a direct way by something that she saw in her daughter; and every now and then her eyes would rest on Lizzie's face with a look of wistful pain. They were not long in the society of their friends before the news of the engagement between Felix and Lily was told them; and Lizzie, forgetting for a few moments the great anxiety which pressed upon her, danced about the room in delight.

'Next to Alfred,' she said, 'I love Felix. There is only one other thing wanting now to complete our happiness.'

She was pressed to tell what that 'other thing' was; but she refused in as light a manner as she could command. That 'other thing' was that Alfred might be lucky that day, and that he might get out of Mr. Sheldrake's toils. It was hard for her to show a bright face when, as it seemed to her, Alfred's fate and hers was being decided. Strangely enough, she also dwelt superstitiously

in her thoughts upon the three times seven kisses Alfred had given her when he parted from her in the morning. 'They will be sure to bring him luck,' she had said to herself a dozen times during the day. She thought of them hopefully now, and murmured, 'To-night all our sad troubles will be over.' A happy future indeed was spread before them if fortune smiled upon Alfred. How she longed for night to come, and Alfred with the glad tidings!

'We'll all live together,' she said aloud.

And Lily nodded and laughed. It was like a bright dream, where everything that was good in nature was around and about her. The woods were beautiful with various greens; sweet breezes were stirring the leaves, and stealing their secrets from them; flowers were blushing; birds were singing; there was not a dark cloud in the sky. The two girls crept into a corner, and with their arms around each other's necks, whispered confidences to each other. One thing—her most precious secret—Lizzie was burning to tell her friend; but she restrained herself. She had solemnly promised not to speak of it until Alfred gave her permission. In the evening, when she and her mother were at home again, she said she

was tired, and she went to her room to lie down for half an hour. Thither, after a time, Martha crept, and sat by her daughter's side. Lizzie was murmuring in her sleep, and although her tones and every word she murmured were charged with love and tenderness, the sorrowful tears ran down Martha's face as she heard.

'Is this a judgment upon me for my neglect and deceit?' she asked of herself, between her sobs. 'I should have looked after her better! I should have looked after her better!' But when Lizzie awoke, Martha was careful that her daughter should not see any traces of agitation. 'I will wait until Alfred comes home,' she thought, 'and then I will tax him and discover the truth.' Everything seemed to depend upon Alfred's return.

And now it was night, and old Wheels and Lily were together in their room. Old Wheels was reading aloud, and Lily was working. There was no one else in the house. Mrs. Podmore and little Polly had gone to London for some bits of clothing which friends had gathered together for them; they were expected to return by train at about ten o'clock. Every now and then, old Wheels paused in his reading, and made a remark. Lily understood very little of the story the old man was

reading; she was thinking. Scarcely anything but Felix was in her mind.

'Mrs. Podmore will be delighted to hear the news,' said old Wheels in one of the intervals; 'although she has been hinting at it mysteriously from the very first day we saw Felix—when he drove us home in the wagonette. That's eight o'clock striking. Alfred ought to be home before now.'

'It's nine o'clock sometimes before he comes home,' said Lily; 'but I wish he was here. I want to tell him.'

Old Wheels read, and Lily worked, for another half an hour, and at the end of that time the old man laid his book aside.

'I shall have to read all this over again,' he said, with pretended petulance; 'I am sure you have not been attending to me.'

'I haven't,' she replied, with a happy light in her eyes; 'I have been thinking all the while of Felix.'

'So I've been reading nothing but Felix, Felix, Felix; and you've heard nothing but Felix, Felix, Felix. Well, well, my darling; I am more than satisfied. Now, then,' he said merrily, 'come to the window, and look out. It is blowing quite

cold, dear child. Let me keep you warm in my arms. Ah, Lily, Lily, now I can die happy when my time comes. But what am I thinking of? To speak of such a subject at such a time! Talk of dying, indeed! I intend to live, and to see my darling's happiness. Ah, God is good!' Then, after a pause, he said, slyly, 'But really this is serious—if it's to be nothing but Felix, Felix, Felix! Look along the road—what do you see?'

'Felix,' she replied, entering into his humour, and to dispel his sadness; 'he is a long way off, though, for he'll not be here for an hour and a half. But I see him coming.'

'Of course you do. Now look up at the ceiling—what do you see?'

'Felix.'

'And into the lamp. What do you see?'

'Felix.'

'And into the fire. What do you see?'

'Felix.'

'Ah, child!' he said, touching her eyelids gently; 'Felix is not on the road, nor in the room; he is here.'

'No,' she replied, in the tenderest of tones, taking his hand, and placing it on her heart; 'he is here.'

She was on her knees before the fire, looking into it, and remained so for many minutes, the old man standing quietly by her side, with his hand on her shoulder, looking down upon her. 'A happier fate awaits her, thank God!' he thought, 'than fell to her mother's lot.'

He sat down in his chair at the thought, and mused on the time gone by, and thought of Lily's father too, and wondered as to his fate.

'Strange,' he mused, 'that one so unstable as he should have been so faithful to his written promise. Strange that I have never heard of him since that dreadful time! If he is living now, would it not be a good thing that he should witness his daughter's happiness? But if the old vice is in him still!—— No, it would be impossible to find him, and it is better as it is. This is a happy turning-tide for all of us.'

Nine o'clock struck. Lily started up.

'I wish Alfred was home,' she said impatiently. 'I do so want him to know!'

'Perhaps he's at Lizzie's,' said the old man. 'shall I run round and see?'

'Yes, yes,' cried Lily, 'and tell him to come at once. Let Lizzie come too, and Mr. Musgrave. Mr. Musgrave is very fond of me, grandfather,

and I like him very much. But I want Alfred most.'

She was tying a muffler round the old man's throat, when she suddenly exclaimed, 'It's a shame to let you go; *I'll* run round, grandfather.'

'No, child. You will catch cold. And think,' he added gaily; 'Felix may come in any moment. I shall not be gone long.'

She listened to his footsteps and to the slamming of the street-door, and then knelt before the fire again. What a day had this been—never to be forgotten! the white day of her life! In an hour her hero would be with her. She rehearsed the scene that had taken place between them again and again. 'I want a home—a helpmate. And there is but one woman in the world who can be to me what my heart yearns for. Lily—will you be my wife?' His wife! Why, if all the world were before her to choose from—if she could fix her own lot, her own destiny—that is what she would choose to be. Ah, how happy she would try to make him! A thought of Alfred crept in. Felix would be a good friend to him—a true friend. How much happier Alfred had been these last few days! his troubles seemed to be over. His smiling face, as she had seen it this very morning,

when he ran back and kissed her, appeared in the fire among her other fancies that she conjured up there. Alfred and Lizzie married—herself and Felix in their little home—— She saw every room in it, and saw them all smiling at one another in the fire before which she was kneeling. But why was not Alfred here now? Swiftly she thought, ‘He cannot be with Lizzie; for the first thing Lizzie would tell him would be about Felix and me, and Alfred would have run home to me at once.’ She started to her feet, and ran nervously to the window; and as she looked out into the dark roadway, a knock came at the street-door. ‘That is Alfred!’ she cried, and ran downstairs; but when she was in the dark passage, she remembered that the knock was not Alfred’s. Alfred always knocked at the door with a flourish; this that she had heard was a single knock. It could not be her grandfather, either; for he had a latch-key. Perhaps it was Mrs. Podmore. The knock came again, and she mustered up sufficient courage to go to the street-door, and ask who was there. A strange voice answered her. ‘Did Mr. Wheels live there?’ it asked. ‘Yes,’ she answered.

‘Is his granddaughter at home?’

‘Yes.’

‘I want to see her.’

‘What for?’

These questions were asked by Lily through the closed door: she was alone in the house, and was frightened to draw the lock.

‘What for?’ she inquired again, faintly.

‘I can’t say, unless I see her.’

‘She is speaking to you now; I am she.’

‘Is anybody with you?’

Almost overcome with fear, Lily answered, ‘No; what do you want me for?’

‘To give you a letter.’

Lily hesitated still: the voice was that of a stranger, the locality was somewhat of a lonely one, and her grandfather had warned her not to open the door at night to any person she did not know, if there were no man in the house.

‘Wait,’ she said, ‘until my grandfather returns. He will be here presently, and then I will take the letter.’

‘Then I can’t give it to you, miss,’ the voice said. ‘My instructions are to give it into your hand, and into your hand only, when there is no one near.’

‘Why? What is the letter about?’ she asked,

in an agony of terror, and murmuring inly, 'O, why doesn't grandfather return!'

'I don't know what's in the letter. But the gentleman who gave it to me told me to say, if anything like this occurred, that it was a matter of life or death to some one that you loved.'

Life or death to some one whom she loved! She hesitated no longer, but tore open the door, panting. A man, who looked like a common labouring man, stood in the dusk.

'I am only carrying out my instructions, miss,' he said, touching his cap. 'Here is the letter, and I am to wait for an answer. You can shut the door while you read it, if you're afraid. I'll wait outside.'

She closed the door, and running like a deer up-stairs into the light, opened the letter. It was as follows :

'My dear Miss Lily,—You must read this letter by yourself, and no other person must see it or know of it. I would come instead of writing, but my appearance, and the circumstance of our conversing privately in your grandfather's house, might excite suspicions. Your brother cannot come home, and it is probable that his life hangs

upon your prompt action ; his safety certainly depends on your secrecy. He is in the greatest danger. If you love him and wish to save him, come and see me immediately. I am waiting at the end of the road, at the corner of the True Blue public-house. The messenger who brings this will take your message, or will accompany you to where I am waiting for you. You must decide without one moment's delay. If you resolve not to come—a contingency I cannot contemplate, knowing you—you may never see your brother again. In any case, believe me to be your faithful friend,

‘DAVID SHELDRAKE.’

There was so much in the note of hidden and terrible danger to the brother she loved so dearly that, without considering, she ran to her room for her hat and mantle, and hurried into the street. The messenger was waiting.

‘Do you know where the gentleman is who gave you this letter?’ she asked breathlessly, as she tied the ribbons of her hat.

‘Yes, miss ; he’s waiting at the True Blue, and told me to bring you to him if you asked me.’

‘I will come with you. Walk as quick as you can ; I’ll keep up with you.’

The messenger, without answering, walked at once at a rapid pace in the direction of the True Blue, and Lily followed him. The road was long, and was but dimly lighted. When they arrived at the meeting-place, Lily was completely out of breath, and her heart beat so violently that she reeled and would have fallen, but for a friendly arm held out for her support. She clung to it instinctively, and looking up the next moment, saw that it was Mr. Sheldrake who had come to her assistance. He waited in a considerate and respectful attitude until she had recovered herself, and when she withdrew herself from his support, did not press his attentions upon her.

‘I am glad you have come,’ he then said : she was about to speak, but he anticipated her ; ‘it is a great relief to me. Alfred was not mistaken in you, nor am I.’

‘Where is he ?’ she asked, in an agitated tone. ‘What is the matter ? Has any accident happened to him ?’

‘No accident has happened to him,’ replied Mr. Sheldrake gravely. ‘But we can scarcely

talk here; it is dangerous; the very walls have ears. There is a private room in this public-house in which we can talk for a few minutes undisturbed. Nay,' he said, in a sad tone, 'do not hesitate at such a time. When we can talk without being observed, I will instantly convince you that I am not worthy of being suspected.'

'Why cannot we talk here?'

He looked round cautiously, and lowered his voice. 'Because, if any person overheard us, your brother would be lost. It would be out of your power then to save him.'

Lily thought of Felix, and hastily glanced through the partially-open door of the public-house. There was a clock hanging up, and she saw that it was half-past nine. A comfortable-looking woman was standing within the bar, and her husband, with his shirt-sleeves tucked up, was busy serving the customers.

'There is a private room behind the bar,' said Mr. Sheldrake; 'that little parlour with the door open. You can ask for the use of it yourself, if you like. But I warn you not to delay. Time is precious.'

He spoke in a cold tone, and as if his feelings were deeply wounded by her suspicions of him.

Lily walked into the public-house, followed by Mr. Sheldrake, and beckoned the landlady aside.

'Can I have the use of your parlour,' she asked, 'for a very few moments, undisturbed, to speak with this gentleman?'

'Yes, miss,' answered the landlady. She knew Lily, and was surprised at her appearance there. 'You can come round this way; no one shall disturb you.'

Lily and Mr. Sheldrake walked into the little room, and the landlady closed the door of communication between it and the bar. Lily, standing near this door, waited in painful suspense for Mr. Sheldrake to speak. He had noticed that when she entered the room she had moved timorously towards the door as if for protection, and he experienced a feeling of mingled anger and mortification, any outward exhibition of which, however, he successfully repressed. When he spoke he spoke slowly, as if studying his words.

'Your behaviour towards me is ungenerous to a degree. At any other time, and under any other circumstances, I might be disposed to wash my hands of this affair at once. Notwithstanding the feelings I entertain for you—do not be alarmed; I am not going to speak of them—I

owe to myself a certain amount of self-respect, and I stand in danger of forfeiting this, and of placing myself in a false light, by silent submission to your distrust of me. But'—and here his voice grew less restrained, and his words were expressed with more warmth—'I can afford even this renunciation of self-defence, simple as it is, and unsupported, except by my consistent behaviour towards yourself and your brother, in the consciousness that what I am doing is done out of pure disinterested friendship and esteem.'

'For mercy's sake,' she implored, 'speak more plainly, and tell me for what purpose you have brought me here.'

'For no purpose of my own; for your brother's sake. It is a matter of life or death to him.'

She clasped her hands, and could not find words to speak for her agony. She had never appeared more fascinating in his eyes than she appeared to him now, as she stood before him in pleading attitude. But although he was under the spell of this fascination, and although he knew that she was at his mercy, he was instinctively conscious, bold and unscrupulous as he was, that he held no power for ill over her. Her innocence and trustfulness were a stronger

armour than any which cunning and artifice could supply. As he gazed at her in admiration, he thought how proud he should be of her if she were his, and thought, too, taking credit for the generosity of the sentiment, that if the worst came to the worst he would marry her.

‘Where is the note that I wrote to you?’ he asked.

‘Here it is.’

‘Had you not better be seated?’ he said, as he took the note from her hand. ‘You will want all your strength.’

She sank into the chair he handed her, and he, glancing at the note carelessly, put it into the fire.

‘There must be no chance,’ he said, when it was destroyed, ‘of such evidence falling into strange hands. For your brother’s sake.’

‘You said in it,’ she said, in exquisite distress, ‘that his life—his life! hangs upon my action.’

‘And upon mine; we two can save him. The compact we entered into for his good can now be carried out. I am ready to perform my part; are you ready to perform yours?’

‘I will do anything for my brother—anything. But I do not understand your meaning.’

‘Your brother must see you immediately; he will tell you in what way you are able to save him.’

‘I am ready to see him!’ she cried; ‘I want to see him! Where is he? O, Mr. Sheldrake, if you respect me, let me see him at once.’

‘That is my wish, and the reason why I am here. You know that I respect you—you know that I——’ The shudder that seized her warned him of the indiscretion he was about to commit. ‘But this is no time to speak of anything but Alfred. Every moment’s delay now may be fatal to him. What is done must be done at once.’

‘Bring him to me, then; I will wait. Bring him to me, but do not torture me with suspense! Have pity on me!’

She held out her hands imploringly to him, and he took them in his, and looked steadily into the pale agitated face.

‘I *do* sincerely pity you, Lily; my heart bleeds for you. But it is in your power to avert all this misery. Listen to me calmly. I cannot bring Alfred to you; he is in hiding, and dare not show himself. I can take you to him. I have a cab at the door. Come.’

She withdrew her hands from his grasp, and

retreated a step or two, nearer to the door of communication with the bar. He smiled bitterly.

‘Still distrustful!’ he exclaimed, with a frown. ‘Well, be it as you will. To-morrow, when shame and disgrace are at your door—shame and disgrace which, by the simplest of acts, you could have averted—to-morrow, when you learn the miserable fate that has befallen the brother who loved you so fondly—you may repent what you have done. But, unjust and cruel as you are in this, do me then at least the justice of acknowledging that *I* did my best—more, I believe, by heaven! than any other man in my position would have done—to save both him and you. Good-night.’

He had acted well, and as he turned from her, his heart beat exultantly at her next words.

‘Stay, for pity’s sake! There is no sacrifice that I would not make for Alfred’s sake. He knows it—he knows it!’

‘He believed it, firmly; and he in his turn would be ready to make any sacrifice for you. I have heard him say so dozens of times.’

‘I know, I know. He has been so good to me! But all this is so sudden and terrible, and I am so much in the dark—with no one to advise me——’ She could not proceed for her tears.

‘I did not think,’ said Mr. Sheldrake gently and with a touch of pride, ‘when I sent for you that any persuasion would be necessary to induce you to act as your heart must surely prompt. I wished my disinterested conduct to speak for itself. Knowing my own motives and the more than good-will to yourself which prompted them, I wished you to depend upon me, and to trust in me, as you may do implicitly, believe me. I have in my pocket proof of my sincerity and faithfulness, but I did not intend to use it. I almost despise myself now for doing so, but I do it out of pity for you—out of a warmer feeling which you know I entertain for you.’

He took from his pocket-book the paper which Alfred had written at his dictation on Epsom Downs.

‘Read this, and decide ; for I cannot stop one minute longer.’

Lily read the paper with difficulty ; the words were blurred in her sight :

‘I am in great trouble and danger. My friend, Mr. Sheldrake, is the only man I can trust, and the only man who can save me. Put full faith and trust in him.—ALFRED.’

‘Will that satisfy you?’ asked Mr. Sheldrake, almost tenderly. ‘You know Alfred’s handwriting. Will you come and see him now?’

‘Forgive me for my suspicions,’ said Lily, almost distracted by conflicting doubts; ‘I will come with you. But I must send a line to my grandfather first, explaining my absence.’

‘Not explaining,’ said Mr. Sheldrake, placing writing-materials before her; ‘no mention must be made of Alfred or me.’

Lily wrote hurriedly,

‘Dear, dear Grandfather,—I am compelled to go away suddenly for a little while. Do not be anxious about me. I will return soon, and you will know that I have done right. Tell Felix this; I dare not explain now.—Your loving child,

‘LILY.’

‘The messenger who brought my note to you will take it,’ said Mr. Sheldrake. ‘If you can contrive to look less sad—if you could even smile—as we go out, it might avert suspicion, should any one have been on the watch.’

They went out of the public-house together, and Lily called a sad smile to her lips, although her heart was fainting within her at the prospect

of Alfred's danger. The messenger who had brought Mr. Sheldrake's note was outside, talking to his companions. She hurried to him, and giving him the paper she had written to her grandfather, asked him to deliver it, putting sixpence into his hand at the same time. The next moment she was in the cab.

'One moment,' Mr. Sheldrake said to her hurriedly, 'I want to settle with the landlady.'

He had seen the messenger who was to deliver Lily's note to her grandfather go into the public-house; Mr. Sheldrake followed him.

'The young lady has changed her mind,' he said to the man; 'give me the letter back. Here is a shilling from her.'

The man delivered up the letter, glad to dispose of it on such good terms; and Mr. Sheldrake, throwing half-a-crown on the bar, said, 'Give your customers some beer, landlady;' and departed amidst a chorus of 'Thank'ee, sir,' from the men standing about inside.

'Perhaps you'll prefer sitting by yourself,' said Mr. Sheldrake to Lily; 'I'll get up outside, and sit by the driver. Keep up your courage.'

This act of delicacy on his part seemed to assure her.

'Thank you,' she said hurriedly and nervously; 'shall we be long?'

'No; I'll tell the driver to drive quick.'

He was on the box, and the driver had started when he saw a number of men running along the road, with alarm on their faces.

'What's the matter?' he called out to them.

'An accident on the line,' they called out, in answer, as they ran past towards the railway station. Mr. Sheldrake did not stop to ascertain its nature, and the cab drove quickly off.

Meantime old Wheels made his way to Mr. Musgrave's house. He was surprised to find, when he arrived there, that all within was dark. He knocked at the door more than once, and obtaining no reply, walked round the house, endeavouring to find an explanation for the cause of the strange desertion. He saw no person, however, and he returned to the front door. As he stood there irresolute, the same thought came to his mind that had occurred to Lily: that Lizzie would have been certain to tell Alfred of the engagement between Felix and Lily, and that Alfred would have come home immediately to hear all the news concerning it. 'Alfred could not have passed me on the way,' he mused; 'I should

have been certain to see him. Nor did Lizzie.' He could arrive at no clear understanding of the circumstances, and he was about to retrace his steps uneasily, when a voice said,

'Have you knocked, Mr. Wheels?'

It was Martha Day who spoke.

'Yes,' the old man replied; 'but I have received no reply. I have been here for nearly ten minutes, but I have been unable to make any one hear.'

'Perhaps Lizzie is asleep. I have been away nearly three hours, looking after my boxes. I did not intend to come back to-night, but I could not rest away from my darling. Come round the back way, Mr. Wheels. Lizzie has shown me where she leaves the key of the back door sometimes.'

They went to the rear of the house, and Martha found the key.

'Yes, here it is; I suppose my girl has gone out for a walk. With Alfred perhaps.'

'I can scarcely think that,' the old man said, 'the night is so cheerless.'

'It is cold and dreary, out of doors,' assented Martha.

'I came round to see if Alfred was here. Lily

is uneasy because he has not come home, and she wants him to hear the news about her and Felix.'

Martha, groping about in the dark for matches, seemed to find something strange in this, for she said, in an uneasy tone,

'Alfred not come home, and Lizzie not here!'

'But perhaps she is asleep, as you said,' suggested old Wheels.

'I'll see,' said Martha, feeling her way to Lizzie's room. 'You won't mind stopping here in the dark a bit.'

As Martha felt her way along the passage and up the stairs, she called softly, 'Lizzie! Lizzie!' But no voice answered her. She went into Lizzie's bedroom, and felt the bed. Lizzie was not there. She began to be alarmed. She glided quickly down the stairs again, and going to the parlour, found the matches, and lit the lamp. Then she called to the old man.

'I cannot understand it,' she said, as if communing with herself. 'Can Lizzie have been frightened because of what I said to her this afternoon? O Lizzie! Lizzie! O my darling child!'

She sat on a chair, and rocked herself to and fro in her distress.

'Because of what you said to her this afternoon?' questioned old Wheels, sharing Martha's distress. 'We are all closely connected by affectionate ties, Mrs. Day. May I ask what you said to her that causes you to be alarmed now?'

'No, no!' cried Martha, covering her face with her hands. 'You are his grandfather, and I dare not tell you. But a mother's eyes can see! a mother's eyes can see!'

A sudden paleness stole into the old man's face, and his lips trembled.

'Is it something connected with Alfred? Nay, answer me; I am an old man, and I love Lizzie.'

'It would have been better for her,' sobbed the unhappy woman, 'if she had never seen him. He has brought shame upon her, and I only am to blame! I should have watched over her; I should not have left her alone! O, Lizzie, my darling! come back to me!'

'If I understand you aright,' said the old man, with an aching heart, 'and I am afraid that I do, a new grief is brought upon us by the unhappy boy—a grief which I never dreamed of, never suspected. I thought our troubles were coming to an end, and that this day, until now so bright and so full of hope, was the beginning

of a happier life for all of us. Alas for the errors of youth! God knows I have striven to do my best, and my duty!

He was overwhelmed with sorrow, but the thought of Lily waiting at home for him aroused him to action.

'I must get home to my darling,' he said, gazing sadly at the bowed figure of the unhappy mother; 'she is alone in the house. Will you come with me?'

He took her unresisting hand, and she accompanied him to the street-door, but she paused there, and said, with a despairing look around,

'No, I must go and seek Lizzie—I cannot come.'

'Do you know where she is likely to be?' he asked pityingly.

'No,' she replied helplessly; 'I don't know which way to turn. I'll wait here; perhaps she will return soon. It will be best for me to wait.'

He did not urge her farther, but saying he would see her again before the night was over, he hurried away, leaving her alone with her grief. His own heart was pierced with keenest sorrow, and he scarcely dared trust himself to think.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A CRISIS.

WHEN old Wheels entered the house, he expected Lily to run down-stairs to meet him, and he was surprised that he did not hear her voice welcoming him. Indeed, knowing her nature, he was quite prepared to find her waiting and watching for him at the street-door, or in the passage, and he was somewhat disappointed, when he put the key in the lock and listened, to hear no sound. Notwithstanding that a deep feeling of sadness was upon him, created by Martha Day's words and by Lizzie's strange absence, the happiness that lay in the assurance that Lily's future was safe was more than sufficient to counterbalance all depression. When Felix had the right to protect his darling from the snares by which she had been surrounded — snares which her own loving nature had strengthened — trouble would weigh lightly upon him. But he could not shake

off the uneasiness caused by the scene through which he had just passed. It was so strange and inexplicable: Lizzie's disappearance, for which her mother, who had parted from her but a few hours before, could not account; Alfred's absence; and, added to these, the circumstance of Mr. Musgrave not being at home. He resolved that he would not tell Lily. 'Let the child enjoy her happiness,' he thought; 'Alfred is sure to be home some time to-night.' Ascending the stairs, he entered the sitting-room, and looked around for Lily. She was not there. 'The puss!' he thought, with a smile. 'She thinks Alfred is with me, and she is hiding herself. Lily! Lily!' No sound broke the silence that followed, as the old man stood, with head inclined, listening for the response. But the silence seemed to speak, and his heart turned cold. He looked around again with a vacant eye, and murmured, more than cried, in a helpless tone, 'Lily! Lily!' with the same result. He wandered into her bedroom, and into every room in the house, but found no trace of his darling. Then a feeling came upon him, like the feeling of death, and almost deprived him of consciousness. But after a little time, by a strong effort of will, he recovered him-

self somewhat. 'I must think! I must think!' he murmured; and wrenching his mind from the lethargy of despair which was stealing over it, he thought over all that had occurred. Presently a comforting thought came to him: the coincidence of Lizzie being absent from her house was a sufficient reason for his darling not being at home. 'I have been away longer than Lily expected,' he thought, as he descended the stairs towards the street. 'Lily grew anxious, and coming after me, met Lizzie, and perhaps Alfred as well. I must have missed them on the way.' In the hope and expectation of finding both the girls and his grandson there, he retraced his steps to Lizzie's house; but the place was dark and deserted, and he obtained no response to his knocks and cries. Even Martha Day was gone. In greater distress of mind, and with a terrible fear stealing upon him, which he found it impossible to shake off, he returned to his own house, and leaving the street-door open, wandered in an uncertain manner again through every room, searching in the most unlikely places. He looked about for a note, a line from Lily, to account for her absence, but not a trace of her writing was to be seen. Not knowing what to think or do, he

stood, helpless, in the middle of the room, with clasped hands, as if waiting for some sign. For the space of little more than a minute he stood thus, when a church-bell began to chime the hour of ten, and as the sound fell upon his ears, he heard the street-door pushed softly open, and afterwards a light step upon the stairs. A sudden rush of tears came to his eyes, and the feeling of grateful relief he experienced almost overpowered him. 'Thank God! She has come back, and I have been tormenting myself with foolish fears.' But there entered the room, not Lily, but Felix. He approached the old man with outstretched hand, and looked eagerly around.

'Ten o'clock exactly,' he said in a cheery tone; 'I said I'd be here at ten. I came by the road, too. Where's Lily?'

The old man could not find voice to answer the question, and the agitation expressed in his troubled eyes was reflected instantly in the eyes of Felix, as in a mirror. For a moment a shadow rested upon Felix's hitherto joyful face, like a mist upon a mirror, dimming its brightness.

'Where's Lily?' he asked again, hurriedly.

'You have not met her, then?' asked the old man faintly, in reply.

The shadow instantly passed away, and Felix's face became bright again.

'Seen her! No. Has she gone to meet me? The dear girl! She thought, perhaps, I was coming by train.'

He was about to leave the room with the intention of running to the railway-station, when old Wheels, who had received the suggestion with a feeling of intense gratitude, convinced that Felix had placed the right construction upon Lily's absence, called out to him to stop for a moment.

'I will go with you, Felix,' he said.

Felix waited at the street-door for him, but before the old man left the house, he went into Lily's bedroom. He had not thought before of ascertaining whether Lily's hat and mantle were in their usual place. They were not there.

'Of course she has gone to the railway-station,' he said to himself, smiling. 'It's so long since I was young that I see everything through sixty-year-old spectacles. Ah, young hearts, young hearts!'

His own uneasiness had caused him for the time to lose sight of Lizzie's strange absence and of Martha Day's agitation; but as Felix and

he walked to the railway-station, they recurred to him, and he narrated to Felix the history of the events that had occurred within the last hour.

'Lizzie gone, and Alfred not come home!' Felix exclaimed in amazement. 'And Martha had no knowledge of Lizzie's movements?'

'None; she was terribly distressed at Lizzie's disappearance.'

'Tell me. Have you seen Mr. Sheldrake to-day?'

'No.'

'He would scarcely be in London,' mused Felix. 'He would be certain to go to Epsom and see the City and Suburban run.' Then to the old man, 'And Alfred went to the office this morning at his usual hour, you say?'

'Surely; and was brighter than I have seen him for many a day.'

Notwithstanding these apparently satisfactory answers concerning Alfred, Felix found food for grave reflection in the information; but the occurrence of other events prevented him from dwelling too deeply upon what he had been told. As they approached the railway-station they saw a number of persons hurrying thither, and some coming from it, with looks of

haste and alarm. Felix was about to inquire the cause of this—for there was something unusual in the commotion, and it was evident that an incident out of the common had occurred—when the very man of whom he was about to inquire seized his arm and asked if he was a doctor.

‘No,’ replied Felix; ‘why do you ask?’

‘There’s been an accident on the line,’ said the man as he hastened away.

‘Jim Podmore is employed at this station,’ said Felix to old Wheels, quickening his steps as he spoke. ‘Let’s get there quickly.’

He was thinking of Lily, and of her alarm, if she happened to be at the station at the time of the accident. And upon the shock of this news, and of its probably evil consequences to his humble friends, came a dim presage of ill which increased his excitement. Suddenly he paused, and said to the old man,

‘One moment—only a moment—for reflection.’

And in scarcely more than that space of time he became composed. He had resolutely shaken off all signs of agitation, and he was now cool and collected.

'The pointsman!' exclaimed Felix. 'That's Mr. Podmore.'

'I don't know his name, I'm sure,' the man replied—it was a passenger who had answered Felix's questions—'but whatever it is, he ought to be made an example of, and I hope he will be.'

A man employed at the station, who had heard the last question, said, as he passed, 'Yes, it's Podmore's doing, this time.'

Felix's first anxiety was for Lily, but he could not see her. He made his way into the waiting-room, and saw, in the centre of a little group, a child lying as if dead in the lap of a weeping woman. He darted forward.

'Good God!' he cried, as he leant over the sad couple. 'It's little Polly!'

The weeping woman looked up into his face, and recognised him through her fast-flowing tears.

'She won't want any more dolls,' she sobbed, with a gasp between each word. 'My Polly! my darling! she's dead! she's dead! O Polly, my blessed, why was not I killed too!'

The piteous words cut Felix's heart and made it bleed. He laid his hand commiseratingly upon Mrs. Podmore's shoulder.

'Thank you, sir,' she sobbed; 'thank you.'

You never thought to see Polly like this, did you? O, why don't the doctor come! Will no one bring a doctor? Look after Jim, sir, for the love of God, and comfort him if you can.'

Felix turned, and saw Jim Podmore, standing, with clenched hands and writhing form, apart from the group, and with so strong an agony in his face that Felix stepped swiftly to the side of the suffering man.

'Don't touch me!' cried Jim Podmore hoarsely, shrinking from the contact. 'Don't lay a finger on me! I ain't safe to be touched or talked to. I've killed my child! I've killed what's dearer to me than life, and I want judgment to fall upon me!'

His looks were so wild that Felix feared for his reason; and knowing that it would do the man good to give vent to his grief, said in a gentle tone,

'You know me, Mr. Podmore? I'm your friend—Felix.'

Jim Podmore softened at the sound of the friendly voice. He turned his face from Felix, and said:

'Ah, sir, she loved you, my Polly did! Your name was always on her tongue; and it was only

this morning she told me of the new doll you promised her. She said you had another ship come home. She didn't know, when she cuddled me in bed afore I went to work, that I meant to kill her before the day was out. "And when's your ship coming home, father?" she asked me; "and when's your ship coming home, father?" Good Lord, help me! My ship's come home to-night, and my pet's laying dead afore my eyes! What right have I to stand here a living man, with that sight afore me?"

A man—a fellow-workman—was coming towards Jim with somewhat of a rough manner, when Felix gently put him aside.

'Let him be,' Felix said; 'let him have his talk out. It will do him good. He knows that I'm his friend, and he doesn't mind pouring out his grief to me. There's no one else hurt, I hope?'

'No one else, sir,' said the man respectfully.

'Thank God for that! Keep the people away from us, if you can.'

Felix had drawn Jim out of the waiting-room; but although Jim could see neither his wife nor child, he spoke of Polly as if she were lying before him.

'Says my pet, a-laying there afore my eyes, as we was a-cuddling one another, "Felix has got another ship come home, father, and there's a doll in it for Polly. There's a doll in it for Polly," she says. She went all through with it, as she's done dozens o' times afore; and she says, with her eyes shut, "Here's the ship a-sailing, a-sailing, and here's the waves a-curling, a-curling"—she knew it by heart, sir, every word of it—"and here's the captain a-bowing, a-bowing." And then she shuts her eyes tighter, and says, for all the world as if she was in a dream, "And here's the stars a-shining, a-shining." Is my pet that's a-laying before my eyes in a dream now, and can she see the stars a-shining, a-shining?'

A voice only a few yards away said,

'Here's the doctor. Move away, and let the child have some air.'

The words reached Felix's ears; but Jim Podmore was deaf to everything but his grief and despair.

'Whose fault was it? I heard some ask. Whose fault? *Was* it mine, when I was that dead-beat with long hours and overwork that I couldn't keep my eyelids open? And I didn't know my pet was in the train. I thought mother

and her was home long ago. But I know'd it'd come to this—I've feared it for months and months. If it wasn't to-night, it'd come some other time. But I shouldn't ha' minded then, for I shouldn't ha' killed my pet. Ah, Snap, if I'd only ha' known! There was him a-pulling at my trowsers with his teeth, and I never understood him a bit—not a bit.'

Felix looked down, and saw the faithful dog standing at some little distance, watching its master with sympathetic eyes. It seemed to Felix as if it knew that something serious had occurred. Jim Podmore was somewhat calmer now, and seated himself on a bench, and rocked himself to and fro, with his head in his hands.

'Don't move for a minute,' said Felix. 'I want to go into the room to hear what the doctor says. You'll promise not to move till I come back?'

Jim, by a motion of his shoulders, gave the promise, and Felix went into the waiting-room. The people made way for him, and, to Felix's inexpressible relief, he heard the doctor's voice saying cheerily,

'There, there; it's not so bad after all! No bones broke. Shook a little—that's all. Killed! not at all, thank God!'

And 'Thank God! thank God!' came from a dozen lips, and a ray of hope stole into Mrs. Podmore's white face.

'The little thing will live to be an old woman, please God,' the doctor continued. 'Now don't be a foolish mother.' Mrs. Podmore had taken his hand and kissed it.—'You must be a wise and steady mother; and if you don't at once stop crying like that, I declare you'll do your little girl a deal of harm.' Mrs. Podmore instantly suppressed her sobs.—'Pretty little thing! See, she is recovering already!'

Pollypod opened her eyes, and raised her arms to her mother's neck. Mrs. Podmore was about to clasp the child to her breast in the overflow of her joy; but the doctor restrained her.

'No, not like that. Take her in your arms gently. Do you live far from here? No—that's right, that's right. I'll go home with you, and will see the little girl comfortably in bed.—You feel all right, don't you, little one?'

Pollypod answered 'Yes, sir,' in a weak voice; and seeing Felix, her eyes brightened, and she held out her hand to him. Mrs. Podmore whispered,

'Tell my husband, sir, and bring him to me.'

Felix hastened to comply. Jim Podmore could not easily be made to understand that his precious Pollypod was comparatively unhurt; but when he did so, his grateful emotion impressed Felix deeply.

'I've lost my situation, sir; but I sha'n't mind that now. I'll try and get a living in a fairer way than this.'

'And I'll help you,' said Felix; 'but tell me, before you join your wife, have you seen anything of Lily on the platform to-night?'

Jim Podmore considered for a moment, and passed his hand across his eyes to clear away the clouds.

'My memory's almost gone, sir, for everything but this. Yet I think I should ha' remembered seeing Lily if she'd been here. No, sir, I haven't seen her; but that ain't saying she ain't been here. The nearest thing to it is the up-train from Epsom.'

'The up-train from Epsom!' echoed Felix, not seeing the connection.

'It stopped here; and one of our porters got a shilling from a passenger for taking a letter to Miss Lizzie—Master Alfred's sweetheart, sir.'

Felix gave a start, but knew that it would be

cruel to detain Jim any longer from his wife and child. The last thing he saw before he left the station on his way to old Wheels was Jim Podmore lifting Polly tenderly in his arms.

Old Wheels was waiting at the street-door for Felix's return in a state of intense anxiety; and when he saw Felix coming along by himself, his anxiety was redoubled. Felix knew immediately, by the expression in the old man's face, that Lily had not come home.

'No news of Lily, sir?' he asked, as he drew the old man into the house.

'None, Felix. And you?'

'She has not been seen at the railway-station.'

It was necessary that he should tell old Wheels of the accident caused by Jim Podmore; and he did so in as few words as possible.

'I am glad that little Polly is not seriously hurt,' said old Wheels—'very, very glad. But I am in dreadful anxiety about Lily.'

'I too, sir. She is our first and only care. You have no theory to account for her absence?'

'None, Felix.'

'Her hat and cloak are gone,' said Felix, fol-

lowing out a train of thought as he spoke. 'That is a proof that she went from the house with deliberate intentions. We must not rest until we find her—that's understood.'

'Yes, yes, Felix; go on.'

'The first thing to ascertain is if anybody is at home at Mr. Musgrave's house. I will run round and see.'

Felix returned in a very short time.

'No one is there; the house is quite deserted. There is some connection between Lily's absence and theirs. The only thing I cannot understand is that Lily did not leave a line of writing behind, in explanation. She knows what deep anxiety her absence would cause.'

'Felix,' said the old man, in a low tone, 'can there have been some foul play?'

Felix did not reply for a few moments; he was mentally busy deciding on the best course of action.

'If there is, we will find it out, depend upon it, sir. I have a clue. I learnt at the station that a passenger from Epsom gave a porter a shilling to take a letter to Lizzie. That letter either came from Alfred or Mr. Musgrave, and upon the receipt of that letter Lizzie has disappeared.'

‘It could not have come from Alfred,’ interposed old Wheels; ‘he was at his office.’

‘We must be sure of that. I have my suspicions that he did not go to work to-day. Now, sir, you must still be content to remain quiet, while I ride to London. I shall have no difficulty in obtaining the fastest horse from the stables near here.’

‘What is your object in going to London, Felix?’ asked the old man, gaining confidence from Felix’s firm tone.

‘I am acquainted with a person employed in Alfred’s office. I can obtain from him the information whether Alfred has been at his work to-day. Without that information, we might take a false step; with it (if it be as I suspect) I think I see part of my way. I shall be back sooner than you expect. I am a good rider, and I shall not spare my horse on such an errand.’

Felix made good use of his time. It was barely half-past twelve o’clock as he ran up-stairs to old Wheels, flushed with the exercise. He cast a sharp glance around, and old Wheels shook his head, saying,

‘No, Felix, she has not returned.’

‘I was right in my suspicions, sir. Alfred has

not been at his office to-day. He asked for leave of absence on the plea that you required his assistance at home.'

'Where can he have spent his time, then?'

'At Epsom. A great race called the City and Suburban was run to-day, and Alfred has been betting on that race, and has lost. Now, sir, can you bear a shock?'

Old Wheels waited in trembling suspense. 'A greater one than has already fallen?' he murmured.

'As great, almost,' replied Felix gravely; 'but it is necessary that you should know. From what I have heard to-night, I suspect Alfred has been using money that does not belong to him.'

Old Wheels covered his face with his hands, and sobbed quietly. Felix continued steadily,

'My acquaintance, who is employed in Messrs. Tickle and Flint's office, was desired this afternoon by one of his employers to tell Alfred to step into the private office immediately he arrived to-morrow morning, and my acquaintance told me that, from the tone in which the message was delivered, he believed something serious had transpired. Can you see the connection between these things, and Lily's connection with them? Alfred,

having lost in the race money that did not belong to him, is afraid to show his face at the office, is afraid to come home. A letter arrived for Lizzie from Epsom; that letter is written by him, and tells her probably of the danger he is in. Lizzie disappears without warning, without leaving word or message behind her. Why? She is afraid of compromising Alfred. Where has Lizzie gone to? The letter she received from Alfred guided her steps without doubt. Do you agree with me that we have now accounted for Alfred's and Lizzie's absence?'

'Yes; but how do you connect Lily with these movements? Remember, that when I left Lily in this house, at half-past nine o'clock, neither she nor I had any suspicion of these occurrences. We thought Lizzie was at her house; we expected Alfred's arrival home every moment. Before that time Lizzie must have received the letter from Alfred, and must have gone to join him. Where?'

'There is the difficult point, sir. If we could ascertain where Lizzie has gone, and how, it would be a most important point. The only livery-stable near is the one from which I hired the horse to go to London on.' And here Felix stamped his

foot, and exclaimed excitedly, 'Fool that I was, not to have made inquiries there! We must go there at once, you and I. You may be of use. There will be no sleep for either of us to-night.'

Before they left the house, they went up-stairs to the Podmores, to see how Polly was, and to leave a message with Mrs. Podmore, in the unlikely contingency of Lily returning in their absence. Polly was asleep, and mother and father were watching by her bedside. Snap licked Felix's hand as he stooped to pat the dog's head.

'Snap knows what a friend you are to us,' said Mrs. Podmore in a whisper; 'but you seem in trouble. Has Lily gone to bed?'

She was soon made acquainted with their trouble, and promised obedience to Felix's instructions.

'I don't suppose either Jim or me will close our eyes this night,' she said; 'but one of us will be sure to be on the watch. If Lily comes back while you are away, we'll keep her here until you return.'

Felix hastily wrote a few lines to Lily, and intrusting them to Mrs. Podmore, kissed Polly-pod tenderly.

'You have much to be grateful for,' he said to Mrs. Podmore.

'Ah, sir, we have indeed!' she answered. 'God bless you, and send you success and happiness!'

Felix and old Wheels shook hands with Jim Podmore, and was soon at the livery-stables. There was only one man there, and they had some difficulty in arousing him. He referred to the books, and said that no lady had engaged anything from the yard that night.

'Two saddle-horses have been taken out since seven o'clock,' said the man, with his eye on the page on which the record was made; 'a brougham and pair for a customer' (mentioning his name, which satisfied Felix that it could not be for Lizzie), 'and a cab.'

'Who hired the cab?'

'Can't say. One of our men, Thompson by name, has gone with it. Hired by a gentleman; ten pounds left as deposit.'

'How long was it hired for?'

'Can't say, sir; all night, most likely. Thompson is generally selected for the long jobs. You know Thompson, sir?'

'No, I do not.'

'He is a tallish man, with his nose on one

side, and a hare-lip; wears an old white overcoat. Now I think of it, I saw him and the cab waiting at the door of the True Blue public-house.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Felix briskly. 'At what time?'

'About half-past nine, I should say. I happened to be passing just then, and now I think of it, Thompson and me had a drink.'

'Thank you,' said Felix, with sudden animation. 'Here's something to get another drink with. Is the True Blue a late house?'

'Got a one-o'clock license, sir. Thank you, sir.'

'It's ten minutes to one,' said Felix, looking at his watch. 'Come along, Mr. Wheels; we shall get there before the house closes.'

And he ran out of the livery-yard, followed by old Wheels. Lounging about the bar of the True Blue they found the usual class of customers, who were being urged by the landlord to leave, as the time was come to close the house. The potman was busy with shutters and bolts; behind the bar was the landlady. She knew old Wheels, and she nodded to him. Felix was a stranger to her, but she cast a favourable eye upon him nevertheless.

‘Can we have one minute’s private conversation with you?’ asked Felix. ‘And there is time, isn’t there, for us to drink a glass or two of your best dry sherry?’

The landlady glanced at the clock, as a matter of form—it was five minutes to one—and said :

‘Would you like to step into our little room, gentlemen; you’ll find it more comfortable?—Now, turn out, my men, if you don’t want to be put out!’

That it would certainly come to this with some of the customers of the True Blue was evident: one man was especially loth to go.

‘Just another pint, missis,’ he urged, ‘just another pint, and then we’ll toddle.’ In a tone of such entreaty that, to one unacquainted with the usual proceedings of such toppers, it might reasonably have been inferred that his very life depended upon that other pint, and that the most serious consequences to his health would ensue if it were refused. The landlady paid no attention to the entreaty, but devoted herself to Felix and old Wheels, who had stepped into the parlour at her invitation. Seeing that she only set two glasses before them, Felix called for two more, and hoped that the landlady and her husband would join

them. He completed the conquest by drinking prosperity to the True Blue, and then proceeded to business.

'We have come to consult you upon a matter of much importance, my dear madam,' he said; 'and we hope you will give us what assistance you can.'

'Anything that is in my power, sir,' replied the landlady, flattered by the courtesy of so well-looking a young man as Felix; 'I am sure I shall be most happy.'

'We do not wish it talked about,' continued Felix; 'so suppose we agree that it shall be a secret between us, taking your husband into our confidence, of course.'

The landlady expressed her acquiescence, her curiosity growing.

'It will take the form of questions, I am afraid,' observed Felix.

'You've only to ask, sir,' said the amiable woman; 'and I'll answer, if I can.'

'There was a cab waiting at your door at about half-past nine o'clock to-night, was there not?'

'There have been three or four waiting, on and off.'

'But there was one in particular, from the

livery-stables near here, with the driver Thompson, a man with a crooked nose and a hare-lip. He came in here to drink with a mate from the yard.'

'Yes, he did,' was the ready reply. 'There's no mistaking Thompson, once you set eyes upon him.'

'Can you tell us who hired that cab?'

'I should say it was the gentleman who was about the house for an hour or more, and who was in this very parlour for more than ten minutes talking with—with——' But her eyes lighted upon old Wheels, who was listening with strained attention to every word that passed, and she hesitated.

'Talking with whom?' inquired Felix quickly.

'With a gentleman?'

'No,' with another hesitating look towards old Wheels; 'with a lady.'

'A young lady?'

'Yes.'

'Do not hesitate to answer, there's a good creature. You know who the lady is, evidently.'

'Yes; but I would rather not say. If you like to mention who you think it is, I'll tell you, if you're right.'

'Was it this gentleman's granddaughter?' asked Felix, hazarding the guess.

Old Wheels held his breath.

'Yes, it was,' answered the landlady, reluctantly. 'There! you shouldn't have forced it out of me! Look at the old gentleman!'

A deadly pallor had come over his face, and he could scarcely stand.

'You must not give way, sir,' said Felix, with grave tenderness; 'everything depends upon your keeping your strength. Bear in mind that this is what we have come to hear, and that we are approaching nearer and nearer to the unravelling of the plot. And remember, too, dear sir, that I have almost as great a stake in the discovery as you have yourself. There *has* been foul play, as you suggested; but something assures me that all will come right, and that our dear girl will be restored to us in a few hours. But not if we're not strong. Remember—we are working together for Lily's safety.'

His tone was so tender that tears came into the landlady's eyes.

'I will tell you all I know,' she said, addressing herself to Felix. 'The young lady came in here, and asked me if she could have the use of

the parlour for a few minutes, undisturbed. She wanted to speak to the gentleman who came in the cab. They were in the parlour for ten minutes, and then they went away together in the cab.'

'Thank you, thank you, a thousand times. See, sir, how near we are coming. Now, this gentleman—who was he?'

'I am sure I don't know, sir; I never set eyes on him before to-night.'

Felix thought of Alfred, and described his personal appearance. No, it wasn't him, said the landlady. Then Felix described Mr. Sheldrake, and she answered that it was the very man.

Felix drew a long breath; he was almost at the end of the inquiry. One other question remained to be asked. Did she know what direction the cab had taken? No, she didn't know; but she would call the potman in; he was outside all the time. The potman was called in, and being refreshed with a drink and a shilling, remembered, after much circumlocution, that he heard the gentleman tell Thompson to drive towards Epsom.

'Nearer and nearer,' said Felix, grasping the old man's hand. 'Now, potman, is there anything

else you know. Another shilling if you can remember anything else.'

The potman scratched his head.

'There's the shilling,' said Felix, in a hearty tone, giving the man the coin, 'whether you can remember or not.'

'You're a gentleman, sir,' said the potman; '*I* don't remember anything else; but there's Dick Maclean, perhaps he can tell something.'

The public-house was empty by this time, and the bar was cleared.

'Run out, Tom,' said the landlady excitedly, 'and if you see him bring him in.' The potman ran out at the back door. The landlady explained. 'Dick has been drinking here all night, sir; you bring to my mind that I saw the gentleman who was here with the young lady give him some money.'

They had not to wait a very long time for Dick Maclean. He was the man who had begged for more beer, and the potman found him outside entreating through the keyhole for 'just another pint.' He was fairly drunk, but upon the landlady promising him that other pint, and telling him that the gentleman wanted him to earn half-a-crown simply by answering a question or two,

he pulled himself together, and endeavoured to earn it. The skilful manner in which Felix put these questions caused the landlady to ask admiringly if he was a lawyer. Felix stopped his questioning to answer, No ; and the landlady said, To be sure ! How could he be ? He wasn't dried-up enough. When the cross-examination was over, they had learnt all. Of Mr. Sheldrake giving Dick Maclean a letter to take to Lily, and of the instruction that he was to give it to the young lady in secret, and to tell her, if he found any difficulty in delivering it, that it was a matter of life or death to some one whom she loved ; of the young lady accompanying him to the True Blue to see Mr. Sheldrake ; of their going into the public-house together ; of their coming out together ; of the young lady giving him a letter to deliver to Mr. Wheels, and giving him a sixpence to deliver it ; of her getting into the cab, and of his going into the True Blue for just another pint before he went with the letter ; of Mr. Sheldrake coming after him, and telling him that the young lady had altered her mind, and didn't want the letter delivered ; of his getting a shilling for *that* ; and that was all.

It was enough. It was as clear as day to

Felix. The potman and Dick being sent out of the room, Felix said that what they wanted now was a light trap and a smart horse. Now thoroughly enthusiastic in the cause, the landlady said they had in their stables the lightest trap and the smartest trotting mare out of London.

‘You’re a kind creature,’ said Felix, shaking hands with her. ‘Will you trust us with it?’

That she would, and with a dozen of them, if she had them. The landlord assented.

‘Now what shall I leave with you as security?’ asked Felix. ‘Here are four five-pound notes, here is my watch and chain——’

The landlady rejected them enthusiastically. She only wanted two things as security—his name and his word. He gave them, and thanked her heartily again and again. While the smartest trotting mare out of London was being harnessed, old Wheels looked at Felix, wistfully, earnestly, humbly. Felix understood him. He put his arm round the old man’s shoulder, and said, in a tone of infinite tenderness,

‘Dear sir, I never loved Lily as I love her now. I never trusted her as I trust her now. Dear girl! Pure heart! When I lose my faith in her, may I lose my hope of a better life than this!’

His face lighted up as he uttered these words. The old man pressed him in his arms, and sobbed upon his shoulder. The landlady turned aside to have a quiet cry in the corner.

‘You’re a good young fellow,’ she said, in the midst of her indulgence, ‘and I’m glad you came to me.’

Before five minutes had passed, they were in the lightest trap and behind the smartest trotting mare out of London, ready to start.

‘Here!’ cried the landlady. And running to the wheels, she handed up a great parcel of sandwiches and a bottle of brandy. ‘It’s the right stuff,’ she said, between laughing and crying. ‘Our own particular!’

The next minute they were on the road to Epsom.

CHAPTER XLV.

HOW MR. SHELDRAKE PLAYS HIS GAME.

MR. DAVID SHELDRAKE was a cool calculating rogue, and was by no means of a sufficiently romantic or daring turn to plan and to carry out an abduction. If Lily had decided not to accompany him, he would, with an ill grace, have abided by her decision. The qualities of his mind were pretty evenly balanced, and he had no intention of placing himself in danger. What Lily did she did deliberately, and with her own free-will, and every move in the little game that he had played was testimony in his favour. Lily had come to him, had made it appear, by asking the landlady of the True Blue for the use of her parlour, that it was she who desired to confer privately with him, had smiled when she left the public-house, and had voluntarily entered the cab which was now conveying them along the Epsom road. He could prove that he had been a friend to her bro-

ther, and, according to the logic of figures, a heavy loser by him ; he could prove that he had been on intimate terms with Lily, and that she had accepted favours from him. So far all was well. But, going a point farther, Mr. Sheldrake, carefully considering the position as the cab drove along, was puzzled. He had not definitely settled upon the next step. He had, in a vague manner, decided that to bring the brother and sister together—to make Lily clearly understand the desperate position in which Alfred was placed—and then to say to her, ‘And I am the only man that can save your brother’—would be a fine thing for him. Setting aside the dramatic effect of the situation (Mr. Sheldrake, having an eye for dramatic effect, had thought of that), it would undoubtedly place him in a good light. But then, on what terms would he consent to save her brother? It was at this point he paused, and said to himself that he must consider seriously what was the best thing he could do ; and while he was considering he heard Lily’s voice calling to him. He bade the driver stop, and he alighted and went to the cab-door.

‘Have we much farther to go, Mr. Sheldrake?’ she asked, in a weak imploring tone.

'No, not a great way.'

'I thought we should have been in London before now; but the road is strange to me; I do not recognise it.'

'It is the road to Epsom,' he explained. 'I told you, if you remember, that your brother could not come home.'

'Yes; but I thought you meant he could not come from London; he went straight to his office from us this morning.'

'No, he did not, Lily; he went to the Epsom races.'

She uttered a sharp cry of pain.

'O, why could he not have confided in me? Why did he deceive us?'

'I supposed you knew,' said Mr. Sheldrake gently; 'I had no reason for supposing otherwise.'

'I don't blame you, Mr. Sheldrake——'

'Thank you, Lily,' he said. Kind words from her were really pleasant to him.

'But I am frightened of being on this road alone.'

'Not alone; I am here to protect you.'

Her tears fell fast.

'If I had known—if I had known!' she mur-

mured, in great distress of mind. She had been thinking of Felix and her grandfather, and of their unhappiness at her absence. But there was some small comfort for her in the thought that she had written to them, and had explained as far as she dared.

‘If you had known!’ repeated Mr. Sheldrake gravely. ‘Do you mean that if you had known, you would not have come? Surely you cannot mean that, Lily! When I parted from your brother this afternoon, he was flying to hide himself from the danger which threatens him, and from which only we can save him. And of course I thought you knew where he was. If there has been deceit, it has not been on my part. And even at this stage, I cannot submit to be placed in a false light, or to be misjudged. I have endeavoured to make you acquainted with the unhappy position of affairs; in the state of mind in which I left your brother, I would not answer for it that he would not commit any rash act. But if you cannot trust me, you have but to say the word, and we will go back, and I will leave you within a dozen yards of your grandfather’s door.’

‘No, no!’ she cried. She was, indeed, almost

helpless in this man's hands. 'We will go on; I must see him and save him, if I can.'

'You trust me, then,' he said eagerly.

She was constrained to reply 'Yes;' but when he took her hand, which was resting on the sash, and kissed it, she shivered as though she had been drawn into an act of disloyalty to Felix. Mr. Sheldrake had made up his mind by the time he had resumed his seat on the box: he would marry Lily—there was nothing else for it. 'I'll sow my wild oats and settle down,' he thought, as he lit a cigar; 'a man must marry at some time or other, and it's almost time for me to be thinking of it. I couldn't do better; she's innocent and pretty, and—and everything that's good; and she's not a girl that will impose on a man, like some of those who know too much.' Then he fell a-thinking of the wives of his friends, and how superior Lily was in every way to any of them. 'She'll do me credit,' he thought. He was dimly conscious that Lily entertained a tender feeling for Felix; but that this would fade utterly away in the light of his own magnanimous offer he did not entertain a doubt. He mused upon the future in quite a different mood from that he was accustomed to; for the purifying influence

of Lily's nature made itself felt even in his heart, deadened as it had been all his life to the higher virtues. And now they were nearing the end of their journey. In the distance could be seen the fires of the gipsy camps; the cold wind came sweeping over the downs. The best thing he could do, he thought, would be to stop at an inn; he knew of a quiet one, out of the town, where it was likely they would not be noticed; and he would leave Lily alone for a few minutes, and, on the pretence of going out to seek for Alfred, he would go to the Myrtle—the inn at which he had desired Mr. Musgrave to put up—and see if the old man was there. Then he would come back to Lily, and tell her they would not be able to see Alfred until the morning. There would be a little scene, perhaps, but he would be able to smooth matters over.

By the time he had matured this plan, the cab drove up to the door of the inn. It was not yet midnight, and Mr. Sheldrake had no difficulty in obtaining admission. As they entered, and walked up-stairs into a private room which Mr. Sheldrake ordered, Lily looked about, expecting to see Alfred. Mr. Sheldrake, attentively observing her, knew the meaning of those searching

glances, and, against his reason, was mortified by the reflection that *he* occupied no place in her thoughts.

'You had best take off your things, Lily,' he said awkwardly, and, seeming not to notice the look of sudden distrust and surprise which came into her face at his words, proceeded, 'It is chilly, but we will soon have a fire, and be comfortable.'

Either his words, or the tone of familiarity in which they were spoken, came like a cold wind upon Lily's fevered senses. Felix seemed to stand before her, and to warn her against this man. But although, in the light of these new impressions, a veil seemed to be falling from before her sight, and although love for Felix, and the responsibilities it conveyed to her heart, gave her strength, the shock was too great and unexpected for her to find words to answer Mr. Sheldrake immediately.

'I will order some supper, Lily. Is there anything particular that you would like?'

She steadied herself, resting her hand upon the table.

'Where is Alfred?' she asked, in a voice that was firm, despite its tremulousness. 'Where is Alfred?'

Mr. Sheldrake was discomposed by her unusual manner.

‘Alfred is not here, Lily.’

‘Not here!’ she echoed. ‘For what reason, then, have we stopped here?’

Mr. Sheldrake felt the difficulty of the situation, and, with an embarrassment which he strove in vain not to express, proceeded to explain. But disconcerted by the steady gaze with which she regarded him, he stumbled over his words, and for once in his life his assurance failed him. Had he been at his ease, and had he spoken with his usual plausibility, he might still have been successful in deceiving her; but he had betrayed himself, and it came upon her like a flash of light that he had set a trap for her. She waited until he had finished speaking, and then said, with an utter disregard of his explanation;

‘You asked me to come with you to see my brother. Bring him to me.’

‘That is what I intend, Lily,’ he said, biting his lips; ‘I will go and search for him. But you want rest and refreshment first.’

She stopped his farther speech.

‘I want neither. I am here to see my brother. Bring him to me.’

Amazed and confounded by the resolution of her manner, he hesitated. He could not leave her in the strange mood that had come upon her; he must strive to leave a more favourable impression behind him. But the words he wished to utter for the purpose of quieting and assuring her would not come to his lips. As he hesitated, Lily stepped quickly to the window, and throwing it open, looked out.

‘What are you looking for?’ he asked, stepping towards her.

A sudden cry, almost hysterical, escaped from her, and she turned swiftly and confronted him.

‘I am looking for the cab,’ she said, her cheeks flushing, showing such distrust of him by the action of her hands that he shrugged his shoulders, and sat down at a little distance from her. He had quietly ordered the driver to take the cab to the Myrtle Inn, and put up there; but he knew that, even if the cab were still at the door, she could not see it, for the window of the room looked out upon the back of the inn. As Lily leaned out of window, Mr. Sheldrake fancied he heard a voice without, but he set it down to the account of some toper going from the inn; in another moment, however, he did hear Lily’s voice, but could not

distinguish what she said. He started up with a jealous exclamation, and as he did so, Lily closed the window, and sank into a chair in a fit of hysterical weeping.

‘Why can you not trust me?’ he asked, bending over her tenderly. ‘You are over-wrought and over-excited. To whom were you speaking?’

She calmed herself by a great effort.

‘The man said he could not see anything of the cab,’ she answered; ‘nor could I. It is gone.’

‘The driver has put up his horse, I suppose. It is a long drive, remember, and the horse must be tired.’

A knock came at the door, and the landlady entered.

‘Do you stop here to-night, sir?’ she inquired.

‘Yes,’ he said.

‘No,’ said Lily firmly. ‘This gentleman does not stop here to-night.’

A threatening look came into his eyes.

‘Wait outside a minute,’ he said to the landlady. The landlady obeyed, and Mr. Sheldrake closed the door. ‘What is the meaning of this?’ he demanded of Lily, in a husky voice, almost throwing off his disguise.

'Can you ask me? You have brought me here to see my brother on a matter of life or death. I cannot rest until I see him. Have you no pity for my anxiety? Do you know where Alfred is?'

'Yes,' he was compelled to reply. 'I will go and bring him to you. Will that satisfy you?'

'You know it will. But promise me one thing.'

'You can't ask me anything, Lily, that I will not promise,' he said, hailing this small token of confidence with gladness.

'Give me your sacred word of honour that you will not return here to-night unless my brother is with you.'

He felt that he had no alternative; but the fear that she wished to escape from him was upon him. In the light of this fear she became more than ever precious in his eyes. Urged to the desperate declaration, he said,

'Lily, listen to me. You know that I love you—that I love you honourably.'

'If you do,' she interrupted bravely, but with her hand on her heart, 'you cannot hesitate to give me the promise I ask.'

'But you! What will you do?'

'I shall stop here in the hope of seeing my brother.'

'I can depend on that? You *will* stop here to-night?'

'I will—by all that I hold dear!'

'And if I am unsuccessful in finding Alfred to-night, you will see me in the morning?'

'Yes.'

'Well, then, I promise you,' he said gaily; 'I will show you that you can trust me thoroughly. Good-night, Lily.'

He held her hand tenderly in his for a moment, and deemed it prudent to say no more.

'Little witch!' he murmured, as he walked away from the inn. 'I was afraid she was going to turn upon me. But I have her safely now, I think!'

CHAPTER XLVI.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

LILY listened to the sound of Mr. Sheldrake's departing footsteps as he went down-stairs; heard him speak to some one in the bar, and heard the front door open and close upon him as he walked out into the night. Then, with a grateful 'Thank God!' she called the landlady into the room, and whispered to her, and put money into her hand. The landlady said,

'Very well, miss; I'll watch for him.'

Whoever it was she was set to watch, it was evidently no enemy to Lily; for in less than five minutes she was talking to the person at the back door, and telling him that the young lady was up-stairs alone. Lily was waiting for him at the top of the stairs. She drew him into the room with eager haste, and clasping him round the neck, cried again, 'Thank God! I am safe now! You will not leave me, will you? Stop with me—for my grandfather's sake, for Lizzie's sake!' and,

overcome by emotion, could say no more, and swooned in his arms. When consciousness returned to her, the landlady was standing by her side, and Mr. Musgrave was kneeling before her.

‘There, there!’ said the landlady soothingly; ‘I told you she had only fainted. Do you feel better, my dear?’

‘Much better, thank you,’ replied Lily vaguely. But looking down upon the kneeling form of Mr. Musgrave, remembrance of what had passed came to her; and she clung to him in a passion of tears, and besought him again and again not to desert her. At a sign from him the landlady quitted the room, saying,

‘You will find me down-stairs if you want me.’

‘You are crying, Mr. Musgrave,’ said Lily, when they were alone. ‘I feel your tears on my hand.’

‘They are tears of joy and pain, my dear,’ he answered, rising from his knees. ‘Tell me now how you came here. When I saw you looking out of the window, I placed my finger on my lips, warning you to silence. It is as I suspected, is it not? Mr. Sheldrake brought you here?’

Briefly she told him of the means employed by Mr. Sheldrake to induce her to accompany him, and of what had passed between them on the road and at the inn. He listened attentively, and with varying shades of emotion; and when she ceased speaking, he told her to be comforted, that he would protect her, and that it was not Mr. Sheldrake she or Alfred had to fear.

'There is cause for fear, my dear,' he said, 'but not from him. When I return, I will tell you more——'

'You are not going?' she interrupted entreatingly, clinging to him more closely.

'I must; you shall know my errand when I come back, and you will be satisfied. Then I will not leave you again. I shall be absent for half an hour, my dear; and while I am away the landlady will sit with you.'

'But if Mr. Sheldrake returns——'

'You say he has gone for Alfred. Lily, trust one who would give his life for you. I would, my dear! I would lay it down willingly at your feet, if it were necessary for your safety or your honour! What inexplicable passion, inwardly borne but not expressed, was it that caused his limbs to tremble as he held her to him for a few brief moments?

What impulse caused him to loose her from his embrace suddenly, and to stand aloof from her as if he were not worthy of the association ?

‘ Mr. Sheldrake will not come back to-night. Be patient for half an hour, my dear, and trust me thoroughly. Let me hear you say you have confidence in my words.’

His earnestness carried conviction with it ; but his humble manner pained her.

‘ You would not deceive me, sir,’ she said. ‘ I trust you thoroughly, and will wait patiently.’

She raised her face to his, and with a grateful sob he was about to kiss her ; but the same impulse restrained him.

‘ No,’ he murmured ; ‘ not until she knows all.’ And left the room without embracing her.

At the appointed time he returned. During the interval the landlady had lit the fire, and had drawn a couch to the hearth, upon which she persuaded Lily to rest herself.

‘ Ah, that’s good,’ Mr. Musgrave said ; ‘ are you warm enough ?’ He arranged the rugs about her with a tenderness which surprised her, and then sat apart from her, with his head upon his hand.

‘ You have something on your mind, sir. Come

and sit near me. Are you troubled about me ?

He did not answer her immediately ; but with a clumsy movement of his hand he overturned the candlestick, putting out the light, almost purposely as it seemed.

'We do not need to light it, child,' he said ; 'we can talk in the dark.'

'Yes, sir, if you please,' she answered, yet wondering somewhat ; 'but the room is not dark. I like the soft light of the fire ; it brings rest to me. I shall be glad when day comes.' She paused between each sentence, expecting him to speak ; but he sat silent, watching the fitful shadows as they grew large and dwindled on the walls and ceiling. 'What are you thinking of, sir ?'

'I am looking into the past,' he replied presently, in sad and solemn tones.

'And you see——'

'A wasted life. A life that might have been useful and happy, and good in making others happy.'

'Not yours, sir,' she said pityingly—'not yours. Ah, sir, you speak as if your heart was troubled ! Come closer to me, and let me comfort you, as you have comforted me.'

‘Not yet, child; I dare not. If, when you you have heard what I have to say, you ask me to do that, I will fall at your feet and bless you! This wasted life that I see in the shadows that play about the room—may I tell you some passages in it?’

‘It pains you to speak; it pains me to hear your sad voice——’

‘Nay,’ he interrupted; ‘it relieves me. My heart will burst else; and I have waited for this so long, so long! You *will* listen in patience?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘So gradual are the changes that we do not notice them during the time—we scarcely know how they come about; until, after the lapse of many years, we look back and wonder at the contrast between then and now. This wasted life that I speak of, how does it look now in the eyes of the man who has misused it? He sees his youth as one, standing at the foot of a great hill where the shadows lie thick, might look up to the mount upon which the sun shines. That was before he was married, and when he was a young man. Reckless, uncontrolled, thirsting for the possession of things out of his reach, he did not stop to think or reason. He could not then have

spoken of himself and of his desires as he speaks now, for he was arrogant, insolent, selfish, and inconsiderate to his heart's core. Bitter has been the fruit of these passions; but had he died a hundred deaths he could not have expiated the wrong he inflicted. And yet he did not awake to the consciousness of this until a few months since—until all the wrong was accomplished, and until he had sunk to a shameful depth—until a terrible retribution had ripened, to fall upon him for his deeds. No one was to blame but he. Life presented fair opportunities to him. He had youth, he had strength, he had a wife who loved him; but the curse that lies heavy upon thousands, that wrecks the happiness of life, poisons its sweetness, turns smiles into tears, joy into despair—the curse of drink was upon him. It brought a blight upon his wife's fond hopes, and broke her heart. He sees now in the shadows the picture of that time. He sees himself covered with shame, flying from justice, saved from just punishment by one whom he has only lately learned to revere; he sees that man, the father of his wife, looking with aching heart at the prospect that lies before his child; he sees his wife, pale, dumb, heart-crushed, mourning the death of

love and hope ; he sees his two children, a boy and a girl, the girl almost a babe——’

He paused here, fighting with his grief. A long silence followed. Lily had raised herself upon the couch, and had followed his words with agonised interest. She could say nothing to comfort him ; her emotion was too powerful for speech. In trembling suspense she waited for his next words. She felt that she was in some way connected with the story he was telling, but the light that shone upon her mind burned dimly as yet.

‘ So he left those who should have been dear to him, and never looked again upon the face of his wife. The time that followed—the long, long years during which he strove to forget the past—seem to him like a dream. With the curse of drink still upon him, he grew old before his time. He had taken another name, and nothing of his former life was known. Mention of it never passed his lips. How he lived, matters not now. It shames him to think of it. But after many years had passed, he awoke one day to a better consciousness of things. There came to lodge in the house in which he lived a bright and good girl, who obtained her living by dressmaking.

When he first saw her, and heard her pretty voice singing in the room next to his, it seemed as if a vision of the past had fallen upon him. This girl and he became friends, and he grew to love her, and loves her now. Often, as he looked upon her, he thought that his daughter, if she was living—his daughter whom he had not seen since she was a babe—would be something like this bright girl. One night, the man's employer came to him and made a strange offer. On the condition that he could persuade this girl to live with him as his daughter or his niece, a small house near London was to be taken, of which he was to be the tenant and ostensible master. While they were talking over this proposition, the girl came home; she had been to the theatre with her sweetheart; he accompanied her home, and the voices were heard in the adjoining room. The employer heard the young man's voice, and recognised it, and it seemed as if the recognition made him more desirous that the plan should be put into operation quickly. The old man that very night acquainted the girl with the proposition that had been made to him, and she consented to live with him. She told him the story of her life, and they sat up talking until late. Before she went to bed

he asked her the name of her sweetheart. She told him. It was the name of his own son !'

He covered his face with his hands, unable to proceed. Lily rose from the sofa, and approached him tremblingly. She knelt at his feet, and said, in a voice that rose no higher than a whisper,

'Tell me his name, sir.'

The name came through his sobs.

'Alfred.'

'And his sweetheart's name is Lizzie, is it not ?'

'Yes.'

'And the story you have related to me is your own ?'

'It is my own, miserable man that I am !'

The silence that followed was very brief, but to him it was like a long and terrible oblivion. Then upon the darkness in which his soul was wrapped broke a silver line of light, so inexpressively sweet, so exquisitely painful, that his heart almost ceased to beat.

'Father !'

Her arms were round his neck, but he fell on the ground at her feet, and cried humbly for forgiveness.

'Father, you have something more to tell me.'

'Yes, my dear child. You must be made acquainted with what has passed, so that you may be prepared. You will hear what I have to tell bravely, will you not, my child?'

'It is about Alfred!' she cried, in great agitation.

'It is; I know where he is. I have seen him. I went to him when I left you awhile ago.'

She started to her feet, and looked about tremblingly for her mantle.

'I must go to him at once. Come! Why do we stop here?'

'Dear child,' he said, taking her hands in his, and striving to calm her, 'you must be guided by me. For his sake, we must keep away from him.'

'But he is alone, and unhappy. What will he think if he knows that I am here? O, let us go to him, dear father! We should not be absent from him in his trouble.'

'Lily, my child, you would not bring greater trouble upon him?'

'No, no!'

'You might, if you do not act as I tell you. A watch might be set upon your steps, and his

safety depends upon his hiding-place being kept secret. For he *is* in hiding, my dear. Sit down, child, and be satisfied that for the present you are serving him best by remaining here. And do not be uneasy, my darling, that he is not being taken care of. He is not alone. Lizzie is with him.'

'Lizzie with him!'

What strange wonders was this night bringing forth!

'He wrote to her, and although he did not tell her where she could find him, she lost not a moment, but came here at once, the dear brave girl! Alfred was at the races to-day, as you already know, and lost not only his own money, but money that did not belong to him. What this false man who brought you here to-night told you about him is true. Alfred is in great peril, and the despair that seized him when he realised the full sense of his danger made him desperate, and drove him almost mad. I came to Epsom to-day especially to keep an eye upon him, for I feared that something bad would occur. Last week Lizzie overheard a conversation between him and Mr. Sheldrake—it took place in our cottage, and she listened at the door. She had not the courage until last night to tell me what she had

heard, and I dreaded the consequences, and saw them in a clearer light than she. I have gone through such an experience myself, and have tasted the bitter fruit. I determined to come to Epsom, knowing, alas! that it was too late to undo the evil he was bringing upon himself, but hoping against hope that by a lucky chance (the gambler's forlorn hope, my dear!) things would turn out well. They did not; and when the race was over, I saw Alfred steal away from the course, ruined and almost lost—I saw it in his face—and I followed him to prevent worse occurring. His false friend saw me, and for a purpose of his own set me to watch my own son, little dreaming of the stake I held in his unhappy fortunes. But Alfred discovered that I was watching him, and he escaped me. I was frightened to think to what his agony and remorse might drive him, and I wandered everywhere in search of him. For six hours, my dear, I hunted for him in vain. I was distracted. It was a dark cold night, and I was worn-out and wearied. At nearly eleven o'clock I was on the plains, near to some gipsy tents, about half a mile from here. I thought of Lizzie's misery at Alfred's absence, and I thought of you also, dear child. I did not know what it was best

for me to do. Shall I return home? I asked of myself. And as I stood, uncertain and helpless, I heard a voice that was familiar to me. It was Lizzie's voice, my dear. She had been searching also, and with a woman's wit knew that it was useless to inquire at the inns or wander about the town in search of him. She guessed rightly where it was most likely he would try to find refuge. She went to every tent and every camping party on the plains, and made her way where I could not, and received answers and civil words where they were denied to me. At the gipsy tents, near which I had halted, she was told that a man with the horrors on him—don't tremble, child!—had come and wanted to camp with them; but they had turned him away, and would have naught to do with him. Lizzie described Alfred to them. Yes, they answered, it was some such sort of a man. She searched for him near those tents, and found him lying under a hedge in a state of delirium. Dear child, be calm! let us pray that he will get well, and that this great trouble may be tidied over. It is not Mr. Sheldrake that he has to fear. But I haven't finished my story yet. Lizzie found him, and prevailed upon the gipsy women to give them shelter. She bribed them

with money; she would have given them her blood if they had bargained for it, for his sake. Ah, my child! I begin to see the beauty of a woman's love, and how unworthy we are! One of the gipsy women made some cooling drink for him, and it was while these two were talking outside the tent that I heard Lizzie's voice. You may imagine our sad pleasure at thus discovering each other. I remained with them some little time, and came to this inn for food and drink for them, and as I approached the place I saw your face at the window. You know now the errand which took me from you for half an hour. It is arranged that Alfred shall remain with these people, if necessary; they will conceal him if they are paid for it, and one of the women has taken a great liking for Lizzie. The dear girl would win her way anywhere. I told Lizzie you were here. She sends her dearest love to you, and says that she will contrive to see you to-morrow. She told me to tell you also, that when Felix and your grandfather—God bless him for the care and love he has bestowed on my child!—find all of us absent, Felix will be sure, after the first shock of surprise, to guess where we all are, and that he will follow you to Epsom early in the morning, perhaps to-night.

Felix, she says, knows more about Alfred than you are aware of. So, dear child, all that we can do is to wait until the morning, and to hope for the best. And now, before you lie down to rest, tell me if it is as I suspect and hope with you and Felix.'

She hid her face on his shoulder, and told him all.

'God bless you both!' he said solemnly.

He insisted on her lying down, and he sat by her side and watched her. When, presently, she pretended to fall asleep, he knelt by the couch, and with his face resting in her soft warm hand, prayed with humble heart.

CHAPTER XLVII.

FELIX CHECKMATES MR. DAVID SHELDRAKE.

MR. DAVID SHELDRAKE, calling at ten o'clock the next morning to see Lily, receives from the landlady a message that the young lady has passed a bad night, and cannot receive him until noon. Somewhat surprised, but compelled to acquiesce in the arrangement, he walks away from the inn, consoling himself with the thought that all girls are capricious, and that Lily, having seen how deep was the passion he entertained for her, and having made up her mind to accept him as her lover, was disposed to coquet with him a little. 'The bewitching little jade!' he muses. 'They like to hold on and off. But I'll soon bring her to the point.' He has not been idle during the morning; he has been hunting after Mr. Musgrave, to give him information of Alfred's movements. But Mr. Musgrave has not made his appearance at the Myrtle Inn, and Mr. Sheldrake,

although he has been about the neighbourhood making inquiries, has been unsuccessful in finding any trace of him or Alfred. Mr. Sheldrake has settled with himself that this dereliction of duty must not be overlooked. 'The old man must go,' he thinks; 'Ivy Cottage has served its turn. It is getting rather warm there, and old Muzzy is beginning to know too much.' The reflection that Ivy Cottage is getting too warm is not entirely new; certain victims who had been fleeced by Mr. Sheldrake and his agents had been writing threatening letters to him and Con Staveley addressed to Ivy Cottage, and the secret of their connection had in some way leaked out. Now, Mr. Sheldrake did not desire a public exposure; such a thing would be annoying and expensive, perhaps dangerous. He knew well enough that some of his transactions would not bear the light. How it had come about he did not know, but in one or two instances the boundary line within which roguery can safely trade had been overstepped. He thinks of this during the interval between ten and twelve o'clock, and resolves to go to the cottage that very evening, and destroy all the letters and papers it contains; they are the only evidence against him. At noon

he presents himself again at the inn. The landlady informs him that the young lady is up, and will see him. She leads him to the parlour. 'We shall be private here?' he says, before he enters. 'O yes, sir,' the landlady replies, and retires. He sees at a glance that Lily has passed a disturbed night, but she receives him with a singular mixture of composure and nervousness. When he tells her that he has not brought Alfred with him, she does not cry and make a scene, as he anticipated. She is very pale, and she listens, without interrupting him, to the reason he gives for Alfred's absence.

'It looks as if I had broken faith with you, my dear Lily,' he says confidentially; 'but the fact is, Alfred *must* keep out of the way until his accounts are squared. The detectives are on the look-out for him, but you and I will be able to pull him through. You see he has made a mess of it all round. He owes me money; he owes a person of the name of Con Staveley money. Of course what he owes me does not matter, but this Con Staveley is a hard nail, and insists on having his money down, or he'll prosecute. Even that wouldn't be so bad; but Alfred has done worse. He has taken money from his office—in plain

terms, he has been embezzling the money of his employers—and they are determined not to let him escape. I heard it an hour ago, from the best authority—from one of the detectives, indeed, that I managed to square. So you see how the matter stands.'

As yet Lily has not spoken a word, and he pauses here, expecting her to say something. She does not disappoint him.

'Will you tell me exactly, Mr. Sheldrake, how much money Alfred owes?'

'He owes me and Con Staveley about three hundred pounds. In a sort of way, I am friendly with Con Staveley. He is stopping in the town for the races, and hearing I was here, he came to see me. I thought I'd best set to work at once, and I got him to give me an account of the debt. Well, he puts confidence in me, and he not only gave me the figures, but the bills as well, with Alfred's name on them. Here they are.' He takes some papers from his pocket, and shows them to her. 'I told Con I would pay them.'

'And you will?'

'You have but to say the word, and I'll make things straight for Alfred at his office, as well.'

Lily, do you remember the conversation we had when we came home from the theatre, when that young puppy' (her colour rose here) 'interrupted us? I have a right to call him so, for I know what he's made of. Would he do for you what I would do, what I am ready to do this very day? I think not. Think! I am sure not.' He strives to read her face, but she has turned from him, and her eyes are towards the ground. 'Ah,' he thinks, 'she knows what is coming;' and says aloud, 'The very first night I saw Alfred, I told him I would be his friend for his pretty sister's sake, and I have kept my word. He would have had to cave-in long ago if it hadn't been for me; but again and again, when he was going to the bad, you stepped in and saved him. He knew this all along. He knew that it was for your sake I helped him through his troubles. You sigh! You think he is in a worse trouble to-day than he has ever been before. Well, you are right. I warned him repeatedly; I told him twenty times to pull-up, but he wouldn't listen to me; and still I stuck to him like a man, for his pretty Lily's sake. I can save him now, and will, if you but say the word. To-morrow, this afternoon, in another hour, it may be too late. His fate hangs upon you, and

you only. Say but the word, and I'll bring him to your arms again.'

'What word?'

Although she is almost falling to the ground, and although she speaks in a whisper, as if the words were forced from her, he hears her.

'Say that you love me.'

Bending forward in his eagerness, with his eyes fixed upon her drooping form, with his arms outstretched to receive her, he does not see that a door which communicates with an inner room is swiftly and softly opened. Emboldened by her silence, which he interprets favourably, he is approaching nearer to her exultantly, when he is put aside with a firm hand, and old Wheels steps between him and her. His face turns white as he sees the old man, who regards him steadily.

'You were saying——' says old Wheels gently.

Mr. Sheldrake bites his lips, and accepts the situation.

'That I love your granddaughter. I was about to ask her to be my wife.'

Old Wheels, with his arm round Lily, kisses her, and strokes her hair fondly.

'My darling!' he murmurs. She hides her face on his breast. He directs his clear bright

eyes to Mr. Sheldrake, whose own eyes shift and waver, and seem to shrink, as falsehood shrinks in the light of truth. 'I will answer for her, Mr. Sheldrake. She declines.'

'What!' exclaims Mr. Sheldrake, a white fury gathering about his lips.

'It is true, nevertheless,' says the old man.

'She shall answer with her own lips,' cries Mr. Sheldrake, with a menacing gesture.

'She will never again open her lips to you. I speak for her.'

'Old dotard! But she *shall* answer!'

The arm he raises to put the old man aside is seized by a stronger hand than his, and he is thrust back violently.

'O!' he sneers, as he recognises Felix. 'Are there any more of you?'

'One other,' replies Felix, with a smile. 'You shall see him presently.'

For a moment Mr. Sheldrake measures himself with Felix; the conclusion he arrives at in this hasty glance is not assuring. Felix stands before him as firm as a rock, and with a kindling light in his eyes, which warns him to be careful of himself. He heeds the warning, and says in as calm a voice as he can command,

'This is a plot, then!'

'If you please to call it so,' is the answer.

'Plot against plot, we will say. Yours has failed.'

'We shall see.'

'We shall.'

Felix is supremely calm; Mr. Sheldrake's passion breaks against him, as the sea breaks against a rock and recoils upon itself.

'And you came here, I suppose, to play the hero, and to trick that young lady with fine speeches. But if she knows what's good for her, she will be wise in time.'

'I hope she will. Lily!'

She does not answer in words, but creeps into his arms. Then Mr. Sheldrake shows his full meanness. 'Take her!' he says, with a toss of the hand, as discarding a worthless thing. 'She came with me from the old man's house last night. How many hours ago? Ah, thirteen! Take her. I have done with her!'

Felix laughs cheerily, and holds Lily closer to his breast.

'It was a lucky chance,' he says, not addressing Mr. Sheldrake, 'that caused us to put up at the Myrtle Inn; for going into the stable to look after my horse, I saw another horse which had been put

up but a very short time before we arrived. I have driven that horse more than once, and I knew the livery-stables to which it belonged. It was by another lucky chance that I inquired of the ostler at the Myrtle whether a man of the name of Thompson, a man with a crooked nose and a hare-lip, had driven that horse down. But it was by the luckiest chance of all that we found Thompson in bed at that very inn, and that we induced him, without much trouble, to tell all about the pleasant drive he had had, and where he had set his passengers down.'

'You *have* been very lucky,' sneers Mr. Shel-drake, 'but all your luck will not avail you to save Master Alfred from the hulks. It is my mission now to assist him to that desirable retreat for fools and thieves. I have you there, my lucky hero.'

'I think not. You have not heard all our luck yet. A friend of mine, a detective—O yes, I have detective friends, as well as you!—has in his possession certain letters and documents concerning transactions in which the names of Shel-drake, Staveley, and half a dozen aliases assumed by each to serve his turn, suspiciously occur. I think the law is not inclined to treat with leniency the miserable tricksters whose knavery leads many

poor creatures to ruin. Some public attention has been drawn to the class to which Mr. Sheldrake and Mr. Staveley belong, as you may have observed. The law hitherto has been comparatively powerless, because of the want of sufficiently direct evidence; the rascals are a cunning set. But I and my detective friend have in our possession documents by which we shall be able to prove distinct fraud; and as those who administer the law wait but for the opportunity to convict, you may depend that the punishment will not be light. Nay, we have not only documents; we have witnesses. Knowing what kind of man we had to deal with, knowing what kind of knavery we had to expose, we set traps, not yesterday, nor last week, but months ago, and the evidence we can bring forward will be sufficient. Temptation has proved too strong for you in one or two instances, and you have overstepped the mark, as we shall prove to you to your cost.'

Inwardly disturbed as he is—for he does not know what proofs may be in Felix's hands, and whether Felix is speaking truth or gasconading—Mr. Sheldrake snaps his fingers scornfully.

'That for your evidence and witnesses!' he says. 'You can do your best and your worst!'

But he begins to lose courage when Felix plays his next move.

'You asked me when I came in whether there were any more of us. I told you there was one more, and that you should see him presently.'

Felix goes to the door which leads to the inner room, and opens it, and Mr. Musgrave comes forward. Then, for the first time, the consideration whether it will not be advisable to make terms, occurs to Mr. Sheldrake.

'You drunken old thief!' he exclaims, with an oath. 'Are you in this plot?'

'And has been for some time,' answers Felix, in a pleasant voice. 'We will excuse any hard words you may use. We are in confidence, and what passes between us is, as the lawyers say, without prejudice. But you have not seen all the cards in our hands yet. I speak, you see, in a language you can understand. Shall I show you another trump-card that we hold?'

'Go on.'

'I heard you say before I entered that you had seen Mr. Con Staveley this morning. That is not true. But it is true that my detective friend has seen him, and we have made terms (this is with-

out prejudice, mind) with him. If we are compelled to make this case public, he appears against you. We hold him harmless, and he is satisfied to get out of a serious scrape without a scratch. In no one instance was he your partner in any of the transactions you have had with the young gentleman whom you tried to lead to ruin. We have this down in black and white. Do you think we have trumps enough to win the game?’

‘I don’t know. What stakes are we playing for?’

‘Those bills and acceptances you hold with Alfred’s name to them, and a full quittance from you to him for all money directly or indirectly advanced to him by you and Con Staveley. We know almost to a sovereign what they amount to. You have a list in your pocket. I also have a list from Con Staveley.’

‘What if I refuse?’

Felix smiles.

‘Why then, I suppose, we must be quixotic enough to pay to Mr. Sheldrake such of those bills as bear his name. Those bearing Mr. Staveley’s name we should be able to settle with that gentleman direct. We should pay your bills under protest.’

'We pay!' interrupted Mr. Sheldrake incredulously.

'Well, say instead that I pay. I am able, I assure you; and I assure you also that I am able to prove how many of the cheques bearing Mr. Sheldrake's name for which bills were given came back to Mr. Sheldrake through Mr. Staveley, and never passed through the bank. Here is a suspicion of fraud, which it might be worth while to prosecute. But we should not want it, I believe. We shall be able to keep Alfred's name out of the proceedings. The other cases we have against you are, in my detective friend's opinion, amply sufficient. And be sure of this'—and here Felix's voice grew stern—'that unless the terms I have stated are accepted by you, I will make the name of Sheldrake famous in criminal records, and will so gibbet you in public opinion that your very friends and acquaintances shall think it prudent to know you no more. Excuse me for using strong language; all that passes is without prejudice, and we are here in private conference.'

His earnestness and determined manner carry conviction with them. Mr. Sheldrake does not hesitate.

'And if I give you those bills, and the quit-tance, as you desire——'

‘We wash our hands of you.’

‘You will give me back those documents and letters—you dog, you!’ with a dark look at Mr. Musgrave—‘which you say you have?’

‘We might be prevailed upon to do as much.’

‘On those terms I accept; I can have my revenge another way.’

‘Any other way you please. This is all I stipulate for.’

‘Can we arrange the business now?’

‘At once. I will call my detective friend in.’

The next half-hour is passed in the settlement of the affair, and Felix conducts himself in so calm and business-like a manner, as to intensify the bitterness with which Mr. Sheldrake regards him. Lily and her father and grandfather do not speak, but they worship Felix with their eyes; and now and then he turns and gives them an encouraging smile, which does not escape Mr. Sheldrake’s notice. But he seems more eager than Felix to conclude the affair, having something in his mind of which he is burning to deliver himself.

‘On your word and honour as a gentleman,’ he says, as he receives certain letters and papers from Felix, ‘these are all that you have?’

Felix, who has been carefully examining the bills, and who has been very particular in the wording of the paper which releases Alfred from liability, places the documents in his pocket carefully, and says,

‘On my word and honour as a gentleman, these are all that we have. I cannot honestly put the same form of words to you; but I am satisfied that the bills tally with the list, and that the amount is correct. Here, then, our acquaintanceship ends. I wish you good-day.’

‘I am going,’ says Mr. Sheldrake, energetically buttoning his coat—‘where to, do you think?’

‘I haven’t the slightest interest in knowing,’ Felix replies.

‘You will alter your note when you hear I am going to Messrs. Tickle and Flint, Alfred’s employers, to tell them where it is likely they will find the runaway clerk who has embezzled their money. You thought the game was over, did you? Here is an unexpected check for you.’

Mr. Sheldrake, with a wicked smile, is hurrying from the room, when Felix, in his brightest manner, says with a pleasant laugh,

‘I checkmate you. I have myself been to

Messrs. Tickle and Flint, and have arranged with them. This is in strict confidence between you and me, as men of—well, we will say of honour. If you go, you will find that they have nothing to say against Alfred. But I should advise you to beware of Tickle and Flint; they are my lawyers in the little matter in which you were very nearly putting in an appearance in the dock. Shall I call “checkmate” again, for the game is over?’

He turns his back upon Mr. Sheldrake, who takes his leave with no good feelings in his heart, you may be sure. Felix takes Lily’s hand, and looks fondly into her eyes.

‘This last piece of news is true, my darling. I have made myself responsible to the firm for Alfred’s debt; and Messrs. Tickle and Flint have accepted fifty pounds on account. It was not an easy matter to persuade them; but I pleaded with them effectually, and it is a satisfaction to them to know that they will not be losers. Alfred, of course, will not be employed in the office again; but he is free, and let us thank God.’

Her heart is too full for words; she can only press his hand to her trembling lips, and bid God bless him. He looks round with a happy smile.

‘All selfishness, sir, believe me!’ he says to old Wheels. ‘I would not change my lot with that of the best man in England!’

* * * * *

A scene of another description took place at the same time between two women, mother and daughter. Felix brought Martha Day from London, after his visit to Alfred’s employers. Before he returned to the inn, to play the principal part in the scene just described, he took Martha to the tent in which Lizzie was nursing Alfred, and said,

‘You will find your daughter in there. Keep with her until I come for you.’

As Martha timidly entered the tent, Lizzie turned with a low cry, and threw her arms round her mother’s neck.

‘I sent a letter to you this morning, mother; but you could not have received it.’

‘I came home last night, my dear,’ Martha replied.

‘Last night! How anxious you must have been! If I had thought you were coming back, I would have left word.’

‘I was almost distracted, Lizzie. Felix found me at the house this morning in a sad state, and told me all.’

Lizzie moved to where Alfred was lying. A bed had been made up for him on the ground, and he was murmuring feverishly in his sleep. She knelt by his side, but could not make sense of the words that came from his lips. Names of horses and jockeys and prophets, with expressions of fondness for Lizzie and Lily, were strangely mingled together.

‘He would have died, mother, if I had not come last night! I found him lying under a hedge in a strong fever. He has not recognised me yet. If he dies, my heart will break! You will help me to nurse him, mother?’

‘Yes, dear child.’

They gazed at each other wistfully. Lizzie’s eyes were heavy and weary with watching. Filled as was Martha’s heart with yearning love for her child, there was an expression of misery in her face. Lizzie saw it, and a sad smile played upon her lips.

‘I want all your love, mother!’

‘You have it, dear child!’

‘And yet you are unhappy.’

Martha did not reply; and after a pause Lizzie continued, in a low sweet voice :

'Mother, I am going to make you happy.'

'Lizzie!'

'Lying there as Alfred is lying now—dying, perhaps—I may consider myself absolved from my promise. Ah, mother, you are not tender to him; you have not kissed him; you have no kind thoughts in your heart for him! Is it not so? You do not answer, and I love him so! Mother, kiss Alfred.'

Martha leant towards the sleeping man; but fast-flowing tears came from her eyes, and she wrenched herself away from him, and said, in a choking voice,

'I cannot, child; I cannot!'

'Ah, mother, you wrong him,' said Lizzie tenderly. 'And me. You spoke some words to me last evening. They are in my mind now. Look at me, mother. Place your hand in mine.'

Martha placed her hand in Lizzie's, and Lizzie's other hand stole forward, and imprisoned it. An eager light flashed into Martha's eyes as she looked down on the hand that lay uppermost.

'Lizzie! A wedding-ring!'

'We were married six months ago, mother. But Alfred made me promise solemnly to keep it

secret until he gave me permission. He wanted to make his fortune first, poor dear! I have broken my promise; but I don't think he would blame me. Mother, will you kiss Alfred now? Will you kiss my husband?' .

* * * * *

It is so short a time since this last scene was acted, that there is but little more to tell. All those persons who have taken part in the story are living now. Alfred went through a very severe illness, but has almost recovered his strength. He is very humble; let us hope that the bitter experience he has undergone will make him a better man. His mind is filled with good resolves as he looks at Lizzie, who sits at his side with a baby at her breast.

Mr. David Sheldrake prospers. Will the law ever give him his proper position in society, and deprive him of the means of lawful wrong-doing? Let us hope that it will—and soon.

The Reverend Emanuel Creamwell still reigns at Stapleton. The justices of the peace who are ruled by him, and who speak their sentences out

of his mouth, pursue the crooked tenor of their way. Last week, a woman nearly eighty years' of age, whose antecedents are good, was charged before them with damaging a fence to the amount of one penny. The owner of the fence, a farmer, would not appear against her, and a policeman was the only witness. The woman is nearly stone-deaf, and could not hear a word of the evidence. She and her aged husband depended upon parish relief for support, and between them would have found it difficult, after their long battle of life, to muster sufficient money to pay for one day's food. The policeman said he charged the woman with the terrible offence, and that she denied it, and said she had merely broken a bit of dead wood with her foot. The woman being deaf, could not examine the witness. The magistrates pronounced the sentence, as dictated by the clergyman. She was found guilty, and was condemned to pay one penny for the damage done to the property of a man who was too merciful to prosecute; was fined fivepence in addition to the penny; and was required to pay the cost of the trial, amounting to thirteen shillings and sixpence. In default of these payments, she was condemned to prison for

seven days. The old deaf woman was sent to prison. *And the clergyman, on the following Sabbath, preached God's love and mercy to his flock!* Will the Government ever recognise that it belongs imperatively to its duty to be careful that only capable* men—men with hearts as well as heads—shall sit on the magisterial benches to dispense justice? Let us hope this, also.

Pollypod's accident was not a very serious one; but it was discovered that she had hurt her knee, and she will never be able to walk without a limp. Sometimes when Jim Podmore looks at her as she limps along, it seems to him as if she is treading on his heart. Jim has obtained a situation in

* In a disreputable gambling action which was tried at the Court of Queen's Bench in February 1873, the Lord Chief-Justice of England, speaking of 'the pernicious and fatal habit of gambling,' declared 'that the habit was one so demoralising and degrading that it would, like some foul leprosy, eat away the conscience, until a man comes to think that it is your duty to yourself to "do your neighbour as your neighbour would do you!"' The defendant in this disreputable action was twenty-four years of age, *and a magistrate!* The case of the poor woman who was charged with committing a penny's worth of damage to a fence was tried before three magistrates, all of them clergymen. Are such men as these fit administrators of justice?

which he is enabled to earn a living by working ten hours a day. Quite hours enough to work for a decent living.

Felix and Lily are married. He is working bravely, modestly, cheerfully, and they are very happy. Old Wheels and he have many quaint conversations together, and Lily and Pollypod listen with delight to their discussions about this and that. They have but little of the world's wealth; but they are very rich notwithstanding.

THE END.

LONDON:
ROBSON AND SONS, PRINTERS, PANCRAE ROAD, N.W.



